

All give and no take?

Social change, suburban life and
the possibilities of sharing in
Australia

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ABSTRACT

The act of sharing is attracting increasing attention as a way to address many social and environmental problems. Advocates of sharing can be found in the civil, public and private sectors, with local community groups, large businesses and government agencies all investigating the possibilities of sharing programs. Confidence that sharing promises positive social change is founded on the assumption that modern societies cultivate selfishness and individualism. This critique asserts that a shift towards a more sharing society will not only reduce overall material consumption, but will lead to strong, cohesive communities. In Australia, such critique has centred on the suburbs that house the majority of the population. In this context, I here address the following primary research question: what does it mean to share in Australian suburban life?

To respond to this question, I employed a qualitative research methodology, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital to investigate the informal structures of suburban life, the social norms, which influence neighbourly interaction. The study begins by reviewing contemporary portrayals of sharing and contextualising this within narratives of Australian suburban identity. It then presents the results of iterative and emergent fieldwork based on adaptive theory and involving sixteen research participants drawn from two contrasting suburban contexts in Melbourne; the Sharehood, a grassroots not-for-profit sharing initiative, and two Master Planned Estates (MPEs). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, with a sub-sample subsequently taking part in a written correspondence method involving the monthly exchange of letters between researcher and participant. Field observations, emerging themes and theoretical development were recorded in a reflexive research journal.

Members of the Sharehood linked sharing with notions of suburban sustainability. MPE residents linked sharing with notions of good citizenship. Both groups had common understandings of sharing founded upon social norms related to ideals of self-sufficiency and independence. These norms disposed participants to acts of generosity towards neighbours, but inhibited their ability to be the beneficiaries of acts of neighbourly generosity. Implicated in these norms were practices in which sharing was experienced as altruism, social obligation was experienced as a threat to private autonomy and

private ownership was experienced as a precondition of generosity. Such experiences compete with an implicit understanding that networks of obligation are key to the ongoing neighbourly relationships desired by participants.

Many of those who advocate sharing as a means of social change place strong emphasis on sharing as an inherently selfless act of giving. In the context of Australian suburban life, the study findings indicate that such advocacy overlooks embedded social norms that curb sharing behaviour by privileging giving over receiving. I conclude that if sharing initiatives are to contribute to positive social change attention needs to be paid to practices that cultivate a renewed social capacity to receive as well as to give.

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Declarations

Statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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Statement of ethical conduct

The research investigations conducted for this thesis abide by the ethical requirements of the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee. Ethics approval was gained through applications *H0011536*, *H11199*, and *H11117*.

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Prologue

At the beginning of 2013 I wrote in my research journal about the intersection of this research and my own life in a suburban neighbourhood.

She handed me the tin with a hug. It was my birthday and people kept arriving with delicious looking cake. But Tessa had done something different. Rather than handing over a cake on a plate, she handed me a cake in a tin. An *uncooked* cake, in a tin. A tin with all the ingredients for making white chocolate and blackberry 'blondies'. All the ingredients that is, except for *one cup of sugar*. 'That's right!' she said enthusiastically, 'It's a community cake. You have to make it by asking a neighbour you don't already know, for that cup of sugar!' My heart sank. Why did I talk about sharing with neighbours so much! I thanked her, trying to hide the resentment I felt at being given such a challenge.

As the weeks and, finally, another birthday passed with the cake unmade, I cursed myself. How hard could it be to ask an unknown neighbour for sugar, when this is what I think about all day? Why is it so hard to reconcile my ideal of neighbourhood sharing, with the practice? (Research Journal 2013).

Chapter 1

Towards the sharing society



1: Towards the sharing society?

Sharing is a growth industry, a new field of study and of practice; it represents a realm of career opportunities, a new way of life, and a concept around which we are restructuring our world. *Sharing is the answer* to some of today's biggest questions: how will we meet the needs of the world's enormous population? How do we reduce our impact on the planet and cope with the destruction already inflicted? How can we each be healthy, enjoy life, and create thriving communities? (Orsi, 2009, n.p., emphasis added).

As very small children, Australians are taught to share. As we burst into tears because another child wants to play with our red bucket, we are encouraged by the adults around us to 'share nicely'. As adults we are again being told to share, only this time it's not about buckets but the world's resources. As overconsumption of material resources threatens to trigger catastrophic climate events, and as individuals report that social life is becoming increasingly isolating, consensus is emerging in both popular and academic discourse that we do not share enough.

In Australia, criticism of contemporary society as socially dysfunctional and environmentally unsustainable has often centred on 'the suburbs', home to the majority of the population. Such critique suggests that it is excessive consumption and individualistic self-obsession that drive many of the social and environmental challenges currently facing Australia. Alarm at the perceived increase in self-obsession is not just limited to Australia, as evidenced in the publication of *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (Twenge & Campbell 2009), a book charting the increasing self-interested nature of North Americans. Across many affluent countries, including Australia, there is increasing enthusiasm for the idea of sharing as a way to address the plethora of looming social, environmental and economic challenges. Alongside the promotion of sharing for change, there is an increasingly vocal call from urban scholars for solutions to social and environmental challenges to emerge from the suburbs themselves (Gleeson 2006a; Trainer 2009).

As I outline below, contemporary discourses of sharing are contested. Indeed the notion that sharing may be a solution to many social ills is a rather vague claim. Academically, there has been little work done on how sharing might bring about change, or even what

it actually means to share in contemporary urban and suburban settings. Most relevant scholarly work has been conducted at a broad theoretical level or focussed on 'traditional' or 'primitive' societies. This situation is surprising given the implicit value placed on neighbourly sharing in much of the scholarly literature. Thus the aim of this study is to provide greater insight into the possibilities of sharing for suburban Australia.

This study is an investigation into what it means to share in Australian suburban life. In the remainder of this chapter I do four key things: First, I position this study within the broad field of urban studies and through this I articulate the relevance of the suburb as the site of inquiry. Second, I explain the transdisciplinary nature of this inquiry and what this means for the way the investigation unfolds. Third I review existing scholarly and popular accounts of sharing. And finally, I detail the specific research questions guiding this inquiry before providing an outline of the remainder of the thesis.

What is sharing?

While I sympathise broadly with activists and scholars who argue that Australian society suffers due to a lack of sharing, I do not think that the idea of sharing is inherently self-evident or uncontested. Sharing is represented and enacted in many different ways. Recognising the diversity of the ideas and practices that are grouped under the banner of sharing is an important first step in understanding what it means to share. To inquire into the meanings and social and environmental possibilities of sharing, in this section I first consider the way critics of Australian suburbs and advocates of a 'sharing society' draw on the everyday language of sharing. I consider how such use relates to everyday practice before turning to scholarly considerations of the term.

Sharing refers to a wide variety of social actions and can loosely be categorised as conscious or unconscious acts. There are many examples of sharing in social life that are experienced without conscious awareness of the sharing involved. Participation in social institutions, identities, practices and projects are ways that sharing can be unconsciously enacted. For example the shared, albeit loosely defined, identity of being a 'middle class Australian', an 'environmentalist', a 'university student'. Similarly sharing can involve the unconscious sharing of histories of nationhood, transportation systems, forms of political representation, and ways of living. Then, of course, there are the inescapable acts of sharing environments, resources and living systems of the Earth with each other, and with all other life forms. After all, we share the air that we breathe and the water

that sustains us with the entire global community of life. In short, unconscious or implicit acts of sharing, what Belk (2009) calls ‘open sharing’, encompasses the full range of common experiences which helps to constitute social and ecological worlds. This kind of sharing is both cultivated by and underpins all forms of social reality.

Sharing can also take conscious and explicit forms as deliberate and intentional acts. To consciously and deliberately share is to decide to ask a neighbour for a cup of sugar, to offer a lift to a friend, or to lend out a blender to the student house on the corner. Of course conscious acts of sharing are not limited to the neighbourhood, other examples include the conscious decision to share religious or political identity or to choose to be a doctor, a fireman or an academic and share in the identities of such professions. Conscious acts of sharing can exist between workmates, neighbours, friends and family members, and strangers and they can exist within broader social and political identities.

My investigation into concepts and practices of sharing is focussed on conscious acts of sharing. Although, as will become clear in Chapter Two, I do not regard implicit and explicit modes of sharing as being discrete. Rather these modes exist in complex inter-relations and can be mutually beneficial and antagonistic. As will be revealed through my analysis of social norms and Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital, ‘shared conditions of sharing’, or the implicit shared ground on which explicit possibilities of sharing are negotiated, expressed and challenged, forms the basis for much of this inquiry. For example, the institution of marriage is implicitly shared by many Australians, but rests on the conscious act of choosing to share domestic life with another person.

It is conscious acts of sharing that are in focus in the ‘growth industry’ referred to by Orsi (2009) in the quotation at the start of this chapter. The rest of this chapter documents how an ever growing variety of individuals, organisations, social movements and scholars express confidence that explicit acts of sharing are a powerful way of overcoming the systemic unsustainability of contemporary societies. This is to say that conscious acts of sharing can remake the implicitly shared ground on which our lives are founded, bringing about transformative social change and cultivating socially cohesive and ecologically prudent ways of living. In questioning this argument I limit my focus to neighbourly acts of sharing in Australian suburbs, primarily because it is within the urban and suburban landscapes that contemporary sharing initiatives are occurring.

Contested contemporary discourses of sharing

Contemporary discourses of sharing are contested. Over the last five years there has been rapidly increasing interest in sharing, both as a part of and as a challenge to, contemporary consumer society. Popular discussions of sharing can be categorised in two ways; first as a part of the emerging 'sharing economy' and the collaborative consumption movement and second as a part of the quest for a 'sharing society' that as an ideal is socially and environmentally sustainable. I deal with these two categories separately, although it is worth recognising the considerable overlap between the two in many contexts. Sharing has also been picked up by local forms of government in ways that bring together both categories. The recent exponential explosion in interest in sharing means that there is limited academic work on the topic as scholars struggle to keep up with the burgeoning trend. As such this section relies heavily on material from online sharing forums, blog posts and popular media.

The sharing economy and collaborative consumption

Currently dominating contemporary discourses of sharing is the emergence of the 'sharing economy', or what has been popularly dubbed 'collaborative consumption'. In 2010, Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers published a book that significantly changed not only popular discourses of sharing, but how conscious acts of sharing were more broadly promoted both in Australia and elsewhere. At the time, Botsman was a business consultant in the UK, and Rogers an entrepreneur and president of a venture company in New York. Primarily focussing on North American examples, *What's Mine is Yours: the rise of collaborative consumption* (2010) draws together examples of intentionally established sharing networks, under the heading of collaborative consumption. According to the Collaborative Consumption website, "Collaborative Consumption describes the rapid explosion in traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping reinvented through network technologies on a scale and in ways never possible before" (Collaborative Consumption 2012). The success of the sharing economy lies in its existence between the informal favours people do for each other and the formalised financial transactions they partake in as a part of the capitalist economy, facilitated by the internet and various social media.

Businesses and consumers are increasingly viewing sharing as both a profitable and sustainable alternative to ownership (Belk 2007). As Alex Steffen from Worldchanging.com writes, "[in North America] the average power drill is used for

somewhere between six and twenty minutes in its entire lifetime. And yet supposedly half of all American households own one” (Steffen 2007). Some collaborative consumption organisations promote themselves as seeking to reduce the number of material possessions produced and increase the usage of each individual item to increase resource efficiency. The rising popularity of the sharing economy has also been attributed by some scholars to the proven ability of social media for sharing music and movies (Galbreth et al. 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007). This has paved the way for the rapid expansion of the online sharing economy into a diverse range of goods and services. For example, consumers can now rent a designer handbag for the evening (from lovemeandleaveme.com), or a tent for the weekend (through openshed.com.au), lease out the couch in someone’s living room (via Airbnb.com), or rent a car for three hours (through Zipcar.com). People can even hire themselves out for odd jobs (using taskrabbit.com), or arrange to swap gardening services for vegetables (through landshare.com.au).

North American based Airbnb and Australian based Drive My Car Rentals are two examples of popular forms of collaborative consumption. Established in 2007, Airbnb is an online platform that matches people looking for accommodation with people who have spare rooms. Users of Airbnb can find, and pay for, accommodation in other people’s living rooms, granny flats and vacant apartments. For those seeking a holiday with a twist, it is also possible to book accommodation on yachts, in guest houses, tepees and tree houses. Accommodation is available almost anywhere in the world and Airbnb takes a small fee for each transaction. Similarly Drive My Car Rentals, established in 2008, use electronic media to make a profit out of facilitating the renting of cars that are privately owned. People using Drive My Car Rentals can rent out their car when it is not in use, or borrow a car when they need one for short amounts of time. Both companies argue that their business model promotes efficiency in resource use and promote the idea that money can be made from the idling time of possessions; not only do companies profit, but the individuals renting out their accommodation and cars also benefit financially.

The advertised value of such organisations is not only in the ability of the respective parties to make money and save money. People are encouraged to participate in these networks not only for financial reasons, but to develop relationships with ‘real people’. For example, many of the testimonials on the Airbnb website make reference to the

value placed on authentic experiences of a place; “I love being able to feel like you're living in a neighbourhood, rather than dropping into a tourist zone” and “I felt like I had a home and a new life when I was in Berlin. I got to know the shop owners, the neighbours, and truly feel like a local” (Airbnb n.d.). The for-profit collaborative consumption model is proving highly successful in its ability to begin to compete more with traditional economic markets and in the way it is changing perceptions of consumption.

Zipcar is another example of a financially successful collaborative consumption initiative. Based in North America, Zipcar also a car sharing arrangement, however unlike Drive My Car Rentals, cars are centrally owned by the Zipcar company. In their study *Access-Based Consumption: The Case of Car Sharing* (2012) Fleura Bardhi and Giana Eckhart, both professors of marketing studies, argue that many people who participate in collaborative car sharing arrangements do so for practical and financial reasons. Eckhart and Bardhi argue that this contrasts with popular conceptions that people engage in collaborative consumption primarily for environmental or social reasons. While Zipcar might reduce the number of privately owned cars, they may do little to address the community building side of sharing desired by many sharing proponents. Zipcar is a car sharing company that enables anyone over the age of 21, with a driver's licence, to sign up as a member. Membership gives them a 'Zipcard' which they can then use to access any of the Zipcars around the city which they have booked. Rates for hire are cheap, and customers are expected to return cars in good time and in good condition. Speaking to columnist Emily Badger from website theatlanticcities.com, Bardhi reflected on their study commenting that “We really thought [that members of Zipcar] would be very pro-social, pro-collaboration, pro-environment. We were starting with this theoretical baggage,” yet after conducting 40 in-depth interviews with Zipcar drivers, Bardhi explained that “When we looked at the data, we were not finding any community,” she says; “People were very utilitarian, very individualistic” (2012, n.p.). What Bardhi and Eckhardt show is that for some users of collaborative consumption initiatives, participation is not *necessarily* driven by any kind of moral ideal, but rather is a result of choosing the most competitive product available on the market.

The rapid rise of collaborative consumption, and its position as a part of an informal economy, has proved challenging for local governments and regulatory bodies. In November 2012 the New York Times published an article entitled ‘A Warning for Hosts

of Airbnb Travellers' that told the story of Nigel Warren. Warren had rented out his bedroom in a shared apartment, with permission from his flatmates, to people who turned out to be respectful and well behaved. While he was absent however law enforcement officers turned up and the landlord received a number of violations for breaking rules related to illegal and transient hotels (Lieber 2012). Reports on various traveller websites suggest that many Airbnb hosts are experiencing similar problems regarding the legalities of short term room rentals in a number of different countries. It will likely be some time before issues of taxation, insurance and regulation are sorted.

What began as a broad umbrella term for a collection of grassroots and small business sharing initiatives has rapidly become the brand of a multi-billion dollar industry. Time Magazine has recognised the significance of the collaborative consumption idea naming it one of the Top 10 Green Stories in 2010 (B. Walsh 2010) and was included on their 2011 '10 Ideas That Will Change the World' list (B. Walsh 2011). As New York Times columnist Mark Levine explains, "Sharing is to ownership what the iPod is to the eight track, what the solar panel is to the coal mine. Sharing is clean, crisp, urbane, post modern; owning is dull, selfish, timid, backward" (Levine 2009); sharing as a brand is certainly popular. Indeed, according to Balch "the market in sharing goods and services is now estimated to be worth £310bn [~AUS\$480bn]..." (Balch 2012).

Collaborative consumption organisations such as Airbnb, Drive My Car Rentals and Zipcar are only possible, and financially so successful, *because* of the prevalence of private property rights within modern societies. In the case of Airbnb and Drive My Car Rentals, property is owned by a number of different individuals in contrast to the Zipcar model in which cars are owned by the company. The very success of many collaborative consumption initiatives relies on their ability to be competitive in contemporary capitalist markets. As such the movement is not necessarily a move towards common ownership, rather it is an attempt to open up new avenues of access to goods and services. The collaborative consumption model promotes sharing in a way that ensures a clear understanding of obligation, cost, and social interactions likely to be involved. As Botsman and Rogers argue: "Collaborative Consumption is not asking people to share nicely in the sandbox. On the contrary, it puts a system in place where people can share resources without *forfeiting cherished personal freedoms* or sacrificing lifestyle" (2010, p.xxi emphasis added).

For many early proponents of the collaborative consumption movement, the sharing economy was embraced as a way to promote social and economic transformation. Neal Gorenflo, co-founder and producer of online magazine *Shareable*, based in the USA but gaining an Australian audience, makes explicit the link between social, environmental and economic security and acts of sharing:

We're using 50 percent more natural resources per year than the earth can replace, and the global population and per capita consumption are growing. And, despite the overconsumption, countries all over the world are being rocked by social unrest because of how unevenly resources are distributed. The social contract is in tatters, and threats to peace and security seem likely to escalate. It's now glaringly obvious to me that *we need to learn to share on a global scale, fast, or die* (Gorenflo 2012, emphasis added).

Just one year after the publication of his book *Share or Die!* (2012), Gorenflo expressed his disappointment in collaborative consumption writing that “money is ruining what started out as a transformative concept” (Gorenflo 2013). What for Gorenflo began as a movement with the potential power to create a shift from the “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality to one of “collaborating with the Joneses” seems to be losing its power. Gorenflo writes that “it’s not so much that collaborative consumption is dead, it’s more that it risks dying as it gets absorbed by the “Borg” and its mindless minions of capitalism” (Gorenflo 2013).

A number of people share Gorenflo’s concern. An infographic explaining Collaborative Consumption is currently available on a number of blogs and online reporting sites and runs with the bi-line “Imagine other people paying to use your things when you don’t need them. That’s the genius of collaborative consumption” (Clendaniel 2011). Such an image highlights the different facets of the movement promoting at once the individualistic opportunities to make money, as well as the idealist notions of sharing to improve resource efficiency. Some people commenting on the infographic dislike the apparent tension between the two elements of collaborative consumption. As one reader commented, “The ‘how to make a buck’ by sharing spin is a little off and disingenuous to me” (Clendaniel 2011). Sven Eberlein raises similar concerns in a blog post on *shareable.net* writing “I don’t mean to rain on the parade, but I’m worried that “sharing” is turning into the new “green,” another once well-intentioned word that has become an overused and mostly meaningless marketing gimmick...” (Eberlein 2013).

Indeed according to Alfred Gell (cited in Belk 2009, p.719) sharing, as understood to involve elements of gifting and reciprocity is viewed as ‘good’, while the capitalist economic market is viewed as inherently ‘bad’. Those within the collaborative consumption brand ride on the goodwill generated by such an assumption. The largely uncritical and idealised accounts of the ‘sharing society’ that are influential in movements such as collaborative consumption, form an important context for my investigation. I seek to develop a critical account of the contested meanings of sharing as a way of providing insight into exactly what it is that sharing *can and cannot* do.

The global collaborative consumption movement influences the meanings and consequences of concepts and practices of sharing in the Australian context. Since the publication of *What’s Mine is Yours*, the language of collaborative consumption has dominated public discussions about sharing in Australia. This is evident in the variety of different media which have picked up the story. Most recently, Botsman appeared on the ABC television show *The Checkout* (2013) advocating the shift away from ownership to access of goods and services. Similarly, in July 2011 *Women’s Health Magazine* ran a story by Rebecca Blackburn entitled ‘Share tactics – Owning is so last season’, and in the first paragraph states:

When it comes to information, we’re outdoing ourselves at sharing. However, since two thirds of Aussies now live in large cities, it’s getting harder to pool resources. But new organisations that are helping us to borrow/lend/rent/swap are starting to take off. They save you money, do the planet a favour and help you develop a sense of connection with your wider community, says Rachel Botsman... Here, how to get your share on... (Blackburn 2011, p.40).

Blackburn then goes on to outline a number of different organisations that facilitate conscious sharing and explicitly links together sharing, the collaborative consumption brand, and the challenges facing Australian city living. Similarly, although for a different readership, Eco-fashion magazine *Peppermint*, also ran an article entitled ‘Economies of the underground: Consumption, Community and Common sense’ (Curran 2011). Curran explains that the “collaborative consumption movement remains a distinctly alternative and, for the vast majority, niche movement. However as consumer dissatisfaction accelerates and corporate social responsibility pressures compound, its way of thinking could very well define the next evolution of consumer behaviour” (2011, p.77). The Australian Conservation Foundation also ran an article in their magazine *Habitat* entitled

'Sharing is Caring' (Lane 2012), while the Alternative Technology Association ran a piece on local sharing networks (Allsopp 2011).

In March 2011 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Radio National picked up the Collaborative Consumption story on their Life Matters program, interviewing Botsman as a part of their Friday Talkback. Richard Aedy, the host of the program, highlighted the range of collaborative consumption initiatives with the introduction "people are lending money to strangers and are renting their cars and even sharing their meals with them. Some models are highly commercialised, while others are less so" (Aedy 2011), highlighting the breadth of the collaborative consumption brand. In contrast to North America and the UK, in Australia the financial need for a sharing economy is less pressing. This may explain why Australia has been slower to embrace collaborative consumption initiatives and why it has not been subject to the same critiques as elsewhere – these may be yet to come.

The sharing society and the moral economy

In contrast to the recent emergence of the sharing economy is the longer standing interest in sharing as a part of a broader political project. The quest for the sharing society can be understood in terms of an inherent belief in an underlying 'moral economy'. The concept of the moral economy developed by E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1961), and the essay *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* (1993 [1971]). Thompson bases his work on the bread riots in eighteenth century Britain and considers 'the moral economy' to be the set of social attitudes and norms that give rise to "a pattern of social protest which derives from a consensus as to the moral economy of the commonwealth in times of dearth" (1993 [1971], p. 246). That is, people are likely to band together in defence of the common good. The concept of the moral is based on the workings of small tightly integrated communities where "it appeared to be 'unnatural' that any man should profit from the necessities of others, and when it was assumed that, in time of dearth, prices of 'necessities' should remain at a customary level, even though there might be less all round" (1993 [1971], p. 253). Thus exchange was based on not only economic wealth, but the general wealth and health of the community. It is this ethic of communal care that many advocates of the sharing society seem to be trying to emulate.

The desire for this ethic of communal care and its relationship to sharing can be seen in some of the social and environmentalist movements of the late twentieth century. For

example the back to the land movement in the 1970s sought to create tight-knit communities based on subsistence, although as Keith Halfacree (2006) points out, the utopian vision often failed to eventuate. Although not necessarily making explicit use of the term 'sharing', local community focussed currencies also drew on elements of sharing as a part of a 'moral economy'. LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems) is one example of a local currency model. Established in Canada in the early 1980s, and hugely popular in Australia, LETS was established as an alternative to the 'big bad forces' of large scale economics (Peacock 2006). Peacock explains that "LETS 'decouple' themselves from the market economy by establishing communal enclaves in which relations of trust and intimacy can be fostered and a 'gentler' form of economy pursued" (2006, p.1060). Systems like LETS are often established because, as Jackson et al. (2008, p.12) argue, "morality and markets are often seen as oppositional terms, one concerned with notions of care and responsibility, the other concerned with the apparently rational and amoral calculus of price and profit" (2008, p.12).

Freeganism is another example of how different people, globally, are putting into practice the concept of a moral economy of sharing. Freeganism in Australia is motivated by an ethos of sharing and the desire to address problems such as climate change and declining social solidarity; to be a freegan is to make a political statement about food waste and consumer culture (Fox 2011; Edwards & Mercer 2007). A freegan is someone who spends very little money and gleans, or trades, for food and other belongings, sharing the surplus with others. Dumpster diving, gathering discarded foodstuffs from the waste bins of food stores, is a key part of the freegan lifestyle (More 2011). The website of the global freegan movement states that "Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity and greed" (Freegan 2012). Sharing is an important part of the freegan ideal not only as a way of redistributing resources, but as a political statement of common ownership and common access. As Victoria More discovered in her ethnographic study on freeganism, "since there was no money exchange labelling the food as exclusively theirs, sharing was a part of almost every dumpster dive" (2011, p.50). The challenge to prevailing rules and ideals of ownership by freegans emphasises a very different kind of relationship to discourses of sharing than the collaborative consumption movement.

The Australian academic and environmentalist Ted Trainer has also linked environmental transformation explicitly with the concept of sharing. In *The Simpler Way* (2009), his manifesto for a return to more sustainable and locally based lifestyles, Trainer argues that:

We must share more things. We could have fewer stepladders, electric drills etc., in the neighbourhood workshop, as distinct from one in most houses. We would be on various voluntary rosters, committees and working bees to carry out most of the child minding, nursing, basic education and care of aged and disabled people in our area (2009, p.8 emphasis added).

Trainer's statement echoes the words of Clarence Lee Swartz in *What is Mutualism?* (1927), considered to be the original key text of the anarchist mutualism movement. Swartz wrote,

The theory of Mutualism, on the other hand, maintains that the interests of society at large are best served by the same means which go farthest to promote the interests of the individual: freedom from restraint, as long as the individual's activities are non-invasive; elimination of all factors which artificially limit man's opportunities; voluntary organization of society into associations as the need for them arises in order to carry on such activities as are beyond the power of the single individual; in short, a voluntary creation and mutual exchange of commodities under conditions which exclude special privileges and state-protected monopolies (1927, p.29).

Swartz's work indicates that ideas of the 'sharing society' are not new. The notion that the needs of individuals can be fulfilled via mutual exchange and an appreciation for the common good is one still relevant to today's conversations about sharing, evidenced by Trainer's argument above.

While many similarities exist between the sentiments expressed by Trainer and Swartz there are some significant differences. Mutualism is very much about promoting the rights of the individual. *The Simpler Way* on the other hand, emphasises the collective and collaborative nature of a thriving human society. *The Simpler Way* sits more comfortably within the realm of ideas of communalism, understood as

the principle or system of social order in which, among other things, the supremacy of the community is culturally and socially entrenched, society is hierarchically ordered, life is sacrosanct, and religion is a way of life. In such a community, people are not seen as important in their own right. Each is an integral part of the whole..." (Moemeka 1998, p.124).

Trainer's work implies that sharing is a part of what makes good this new way of living, while for Swartz, sharing is a means by which individuals can ensure that their own goals are met.

Collectivism is a similar ideological model of society to mutualism, although where early twentieth century mutualism was rooted in communist ideology, collectivism is more commonly associated with anarchist liberalism. Mutualism, collectivism and communalism are inherently about the creation of a 'sharing society', indicating that ideas of sharing have been continually raised and questioned in modern societies. Indeed one could argue that questions of sharing, in various forms, have been central to wider tensions between individual freedoms and common goods in modern political debate.

Recent attempts to put such a vision of a sharing society into practice have seen a boom in online sharing networks, such as the Melbourne based Sharehood (www.thesharehood.org) and Sydney-based Friends With Things (www.friendswiththings.com.au), designed to facilitate the sharing of goods (such as lawn mowers, kayaks, sewing machines, recipe books, garden space etc.,) and services (such as maths tutoring, computer repairs, recorder lessons etc.,) with neighbours. As the front page of the Sharehood website states:

The Sharehood aims to build joyful, sustainable and resilient communities by encouraging people to get to know their neighbours and share with them.

We image a world of vibrant communities where people share locally to meet their needs and help others to do the same (The Sharehood 2011).

The Sharehood, while essentially being driven by the desire to contribute to broader social change for sustainability is also considered to be a collaborative consumption initiative. In March 2011, Sydney newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, ran an article

on the rise in Australian co-operatives. The article explained the term ‘collaborative consumption’ and provided a number of examples of non-profit and ethically driven organisations such as the Sharehood (Knight 2011). It is important to remember that categorising sharing as either a part of the sharing economy or the sharing society is purely a heuristic device and the terms are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed an increasing body of literature argues that morality and markets are mutually implicated (P. Jackson, *et al*, 2000; Kaiser & Lien, 2006; Smith, 2005).

American writer Jay Walljasper also advocates for a socially and environmentally sustainable future built on sharing. In *All That We Share: A Field Guide to the Commons* (2010), Walljasper links the act of sharing with the concept of the commons (a communally accessed resource). In writing the introduction to the book, environmentalist Bill McKibben states that “the commons is a crucial part of the human story that must be recovered if we are to deal with the problems now crowding in on us” (McKibben 2010, p.xix). In short, it is because of the things that we as human beings implicitly share, the ocean, the earth, the air, and our histories that we need to promote and invite conscious acts of sharing at both the global and the local scale.

Government

The claim that sharing is socially and environmentally transformative is not limited to community groups. Australian government departments and municipal councils are exploring the potential of sharing initiatives to promote local economies and to reduce waste. As such, governments and councils are ostensibly interested in both the sharing economy and the potential of sharing practices to transform social behaviour. The South Australian (SA) Government, for example, is looking to establish a ‘sharing’ initiative as a part of the Zero Waste SA program. Sharon Ede, Senior Advisor on industry sustainability with Zero Waste SA explained in an email on 15th May 2012: “Our visible interest is from a resource consumption angle, to get our heads out of bins (recycle, compost) and look at the social and cultural systems that both create demand for resources and generate waste”. Similarly Moreland City Council in Victoria list a range of sharing networks on their website under the headings ‘How to reduce your rubbish’ and ‘Swap and share goods and services’ (Moreland City Council 2008). Sydney City Council is similarly interested in the benefits of sharing initiatives for economic, waste management and community development reasons (K Read 2013, pers. comm., 28 Feb). The assumption of these organisations is if people can borrow an item from a neighbour,

then the demand for ladder production (for example) will decrease and the rate at which the world's resources are used will decline. At the same time, it is hoped that social interaction will increase as people exchange favours and come to rely more on each other. The advent of the sharing economy and collaborative consumption initiatives has been so recent and so rapid that very little formal discussion exists in Australia about government interest and involvement in formal sharing initiatives.

Drawing together contested notions of sharing

The significance of the language of collaborative consumption and the sharing economy for Australian discussions on sharing should not be underestimated. The crossover between sharing as a grassroots community-building practice and sharing as niche business opportunity within the broader global market further clouds what was already a slightly ambiguous language of sharing. As a researcher it is frustrating to find that the discourses of sharing have been somehow hijacked by the language of collaborative consumption. In conducting this inquiry I step away from the language of collaborative consumption and seek more broadly to shed light on the understandings of sharing of those at which new sharing initiatives seem to be targeted – namely those living in cities and suburbs.

I've shown above the various different advocates of sharing, the emphasis by groups and individuals on the benefits of sharing environmentally, socially, economically and/or a combination of all three. But what is it about sharing that makes it so appealing? How is it that concepts of sharing have come to carry such high hopes for a better future? Australian social commentator Hugh Mackay argues that in order to live the kind of moral and praiseworthy existence that makes for 'the good life' "we need to be taught how to cooperate rather than compete" (Mackay 2013, p.1). I suggest that this essence of cooperation, the opportunity to contribute to a broader social good and to be a part of the fabric of the broader social weave, underlies many assumptions about the inherent 'good' of sharing. Indeed, as will be explored later in this chapter, it is this belief in the goodness of local community bonds, connection with neighbours, which makes the suburban domestic sphere ripe for sharing initiatives.

It is apparent that despite the increasingly popular nature of 'sharing' there is no clear definition or explanation for the term. Russell Belk explains that this not just limited to popular discourses of sharing, such confusion is also present in scholarly literature. This

is because of “the ubiquity... and resulting taken-for-granted character [of sharing]” (2009, p.716). This is not surprising. Many social movements are influential precisely because they are formed around elastic or accommodating concepts. Sustainability and resilience are two examples of similarly ambiguous terms around which not only social movements, but broader policy conversations are shaped. Aidan Davison argues that “we need to hold the essential ambiguities of notions like... ‘sustainability’ before us. We need to uphold this ambiguity publicly... to think deeply and openly about the nature of our latemodern crisis. The slavish pursuit of absolute certainty has long fed the roots of modernity’s predicament” (2001, p.4). Similarly, Walker and Cooper argue about the value of the contested nature of the term ‘resilience’: “Abstract and malleable enough to encompass the worlds of high finance, defence and urban infrastructure within a single analytic, the concept of resilience is becoming a pervasive idiom of global governance” (2011, p.144). Like the terms sustainability and resilience, the language of sharing is ambiguous enough to attract the broad gamut of sharing initiatives and advocates indicated above.

Scholarship of sharing

Scholarly literature that explicitly explores the meanings and practices of sharing is relatively limited. The work that does exist is situated predominantly within the disparate disciplines of anthropology and business and consumer studies. Much of the work has concentrated on non-modern societies. While scholars from the environmental studies field, such as Trainer (2009), write about the *need* for sharing in modern societies, they fail to interrogate what it actually *means* to share. As was apparent in the previous sections, the rapid rise of the sharing economy has also meant that as yet there is little academic literature on collaborative consumption and the social, environmental and economic implications of the movement. This study thus helps to provide insight into the Australian sharing landscape. First however, I examine the way sharing is conceptualised in the existing sharing literature.

While existing scholarly literature encompasses a variety of perspectives on sharing it can be loosely grouped into two competing arguments about its nature which I will discuss below. The first argument presents sharing as the one way transfer of resources, based on a clear distinction between the roles of the ‘giver’ and the ‘receiver’. In contrast, the second argument contends that sharing is a practice loaded with social

expectations of obligation and reciprocation in which the roles of giver and receiver are more dynamically defined.

Many theoretical explanations of sharing emphasise acts of one way resource transfer. In anthropological studies of pre-modern societies, the predominant view in the 1960s was that resources such as meat were shared (distributed amongst the community, including those not involved in the hunt) in order to avoid spoilage (Bird-David 2005). Such a practice was understood as a one-way transfer – the hunter offered the meat and expected nothing in return. Anthropologist John Price argues that:

As a relation between people, sharing is usually an un-equal exchange, because some people are consistently in a better position to give. Sharing is characterised by the attitude that each person will do what is appropriate, not by an expectation of equivalent return as in reciprocity. The ideal of “from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs” draws from this mundane, household arrangement of sharing (1975, p.6).

Price argues that behaviour is thus not motivated by expectations of reciprocity. However this explanation of sharing does leave scope for the possibility that by virtue of being a part of a broader community, acts of giving and receiving balance out over time.

Some scholars define sharing as a non-reciprocal behaviour (Benkler 2004; Widlok 2004). For example, Benkler defines sharing as a “non-reciprocal pro-social behaviour” (2004, p.275). In doing so he explains that he uses the term ‘sharing’ in his work on sharing as a modality of economic production, to distance himself from directly responsive concepts of exchange. Similarly Belk (2007, p.126) defines sharing as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use.” Neither considers directly the role of reciprocity in sharing relationships.

Anthropologist Thomas Widlok also defines sharing as non-reciprocal in order to more easily order his conceptual thinking in his paper *Sharing by Default: Outline of an Anthropology of Virtue* (2004). He argues that in much of the anthropological literatures “sharing is not only unbalanced but a completely one-sided transfer and therefore not reciprocal at all” (2004, p.61). Widlok argues that given the time lag often at play in broader systems of reciprocity it is impossible to tell whether or not an act is one sided or not. Therefore he suggests that “instead of focussing on the question of balancing

[give and take] it seems more important, and more pragmatic, therefore, to focus on the fact that sharing is morally and logically an act *for its own sake*" (2004, p.61 emphasis in original). Widlok goes on to argue that the limitations of research methods mean that it is near impossible to determine whether or not a particular transfer was ever going to be reciprocated.

Yet what it means to reciprocate, or to expect reciprocation is also contested. Marshall Sahlins (1974) uses his notion of generalised reciprocity to argue that inherent in all forms of resource distribution, including sharing, there exists at least a weak obligation to reciprocate. Through the lens of the theory of generalised reciprocity a person might expect their act of sharing to be reciprocated, there is a general indifference to the exact nature or timing of return. In expecting reciprocation however, the theory of generalised reciprocity explains a general indifference to time, quality or quantity of return. For example while a hunter gives up his meat without any expectation of direct return, his practice is unconsciously based on the assumption that as a part of his membership within the broader social group, his generous behaviour will eventually be reciprocated. Thus what looks like a purely one-sided transfer is, according to Sahlins, a long term practice of reciprocity.

Writing from a consumer research perspective, Belk (2009) notes the conceptual confusion present in much scholarly work on sharing. In particular, he highlights the lack of distinction between concepts of sharing, gift giving and commodity exchange. Belk suggests that rather than attempting precise definitions of each "we may instead judge whether something is sharing, gift giving or commodity exchange based on its resemblance to prototypes of each" (2009, p. 717). Belk (2007) argues that sharing has two key prototypes; mothering (in which the mother shares her body and milk with the child and in doing so gives freely) and family (in which possessions are jointly owned and accessed). The prototype of gift giving is based on the notion of a pure or perfect gift. As Belk explains, "the perfect gift is immaterial (the thought counts more than the material manifestation), priceless (removed from the monetary considerations of commodity exchange), and imposes no obligation of a return gift" (2009, p. 718). There are plenty of arguments against the existence of perfect gift (Mauss 1969 [1925]; Derrida 1992), to be discussed in Chapter Seven, however this does not remove its value as one of Belk's 'perfect' typologies. And finally the prototype for economic exchange is the calculated exchange of money for a good or service in an 'unconditional reciprocal transaction'

(Belk, 2009, p. 718). Explaining further the value of prototypes Belk writes “Just as a child may have her mother’s eyes and smile or have her height and intelligence, we judge family resemblance based on multiple characteristics of the prototype” (2009, p. 717).

Belk’s prototypes of sharing enable acts of sharing to be positioned in relation to different expressions and qualities of reciprocation. Theoretically such an approach is potentially useful as a way of categorising exchange practices more broadly, but it fails to provide insight into what sharing actually *means* when practised. I begin this inquiry with the understanding that sharing is a set of social practices involving acts of giving and receiving. Yet I find such a definition dissatisfying in its inadequacy for critically thinking about sharing in contemporary Australian society and thus I ask, ‘what is sharing and what does it mean?’

Suburban studies: positioning this work

I position this inquiry in the suburban context for two key reasons: first because, as Gleeson (2006a) notes, it is from our cities that change must come (and indeed sharing is seen as a practice for bringing about change). Second, our cities are primarily made up of suburban residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), where suburban is defined as people who live in low density detached dwellings.

In conducting a study in the suburban context, I also position myself within the emerging international field of suburban studies that has taken shape in the borderlands between urban studies, anthropology, cultural studies and history over the past thirty years (Bruegmann 2005). Foundational works in this field include Robert Fishman’s (1987) *Bourgeois Utopias* and Kenneth Jackson’s (1985) *Crabgrass Frontier*. These and other explorations of the modern suburban condition arguably built upon the work of earlier urbanists such as Herbert Gans and Lewis Mumford. Since these beginning, this field has grown and diversified, especially over the past decade. This is evidenced in the range of various research networks and study centres across the world dedicated to urban and suburban studies, for example the Cultures of the Suburbs International Research Network (UK), the Suburban Studies unit at Kingston University (UK), and The National Centre for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University (USA).

Before there were suburbs there were towns and cities and scholars have long engaged in rigorous discussion about urban settlements (see for example Weber 1899; Simmel 1903). Cities, as large scale human settlements, have been much criticised for their contribution to social decay and a plethora of social and environmental sins (Booth 1902; Steffens 1904; Sinclair 1906; Park 1916; Zorbaugh 1929). For scholars like Max Weber, cities, both modern and feudal, provided perfect sites for the study of power in society. Michael Bounds explains that for Weber, “Cities as the arena and engine of change provided a stage for struggles between classes and status groups and the emergence of new institutions” (2004, p.11). Others such as Durkheim, Marx and Engels also used cities as important parts of their scholarly work. For example Marx and Engels were particularly interested in the distinction between town, or city, and rural life and the social implications of settlement type and location as a means for separating material and mental labours (Bounds 2004, p.7). I mention such scholars only briefly here as a way of demonstrating that at least initially, interest in urban and suburban settlements emerged as much as a result of theoretical interest in society as it did from any inherent interest in the *form* of the modern city. While the suburbs have at times been immune to much of the criticism levelled at cities, as will become evident below, both scholarly and popular writing tends to find fault with both.

The suburban form has proliferated at various times for different reasons in different places. In defining the term ‘suburban’ Fishman (1987) distinguishes between pre-modern and modern suburbs, arguing that the latter emerged in the mid-1700s as a response to the growth of capitalism and industrial economic relations. It is the modern suburbs with which this inquiry is concerned. As cities increasingly became wealthy economic hubs the class of rich merchants also grew. While the cities were excellent places for business, merchants became concerned about the safety and security of cities as places for the wealthy to live. As a result the development of suburbs can be seen as a move by merchants to emulate the lives of landed gentry on the edges of cities. The daily commute enabled the merchants to place distance between their home and their wealth (and the source of their wealth).

Robert Fishman and Kenneth L. Jackson are considered to be two of the most significant figures in suburban studies. Fishman follows the story of suburbia from eighteenth century London to its perceived decline in the late-twentieth century decentralised cities of North America. At the centre of this story, Fishman argues that “the most radical

rethinking of the relation between the residence and the city in the history of domestic architecture” (1987, p.3). Indeed he considers this new relationship to have had far reaching social implications, beyond the physical form of the home: “Most importantly, suburbia embodies a new ideal of family life, an ideal so emotionally charged that it made the home more sacred to the bourgeoisie than any place of worship” (Fishman 1987, p.3).

In *Crabgrass Frontiers: The Suburbanization of the United States* (1985), Jackson applies a similar argument to Fishman, explaining that suburbia has come to symbolise

the fullest, most unadulterated embodiment of contemporary culture; it is a manifestation of such fundamental characteristics of American society as conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division between work and leisure, and a tendency towards racial and economic exclusiveness (Jackson 1985, p.4).

While Fishman and Jackson were specifically writing about the North American context some thirty years ago, I suggest that Australian suburbs today are understood in a similar light. It is because of the perception that suburbs are individualised, exclusive and over-consuming that many proponents of the sharing society consider them places in need of fixing. Indeed specifically in need of fixing through the introduction of systems of sharing.

Fishman’s *Bourgeois Utopias* (1987) and Jackson’s *Crabgrass Frontiers* (1985) provide broad geographical and historical analysis of North American suburban form and experience. In this study I intend to provide a more detailed snapshot of suburban life, more similar to the work of ethnographer Herbert Gans who set out to understand “how a new community came into being, how people change when they leave the city, and how they live and politic in suburbia” (Gans 1967, p.v). Obviously my aims differ to Gans’. I am primarily interested in those already living in established suburban areas, but the intent to understand in detail how lives are lived within specific suburban contexts is the same. Although I acknowledge the significance globally of the work of scholars such as Jackson, Fishman and Gans, the detail I wish to incorporate here is that of Australian suburbia.

There are many different ways of defining a suburb; physical form, geographical location, the demographics of those who live there. While developing a clear definition

of suburban environments would require an entire research project of its own, I briefly explore here the rich complexity of the term. Historically, suburbs are those residential developments on the fringes of cities in which residents carry out domestic life in individual dwellings on individual plots of land (low density is a defining element of suburban form). They offer what Gilbert (1988) calls ‘a marvellous compromise’ between rural and city living. Yet this definition has become more complicated as the fringes of cities begin to grow and thus houses once on the edges become, overtime, set close to the city centre. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary acknowledges this change and defines a suburb as “a district, especially a residential area, lying immediately outside or (now) within the boundaries of a town or city” (2007, p.3091). But suburbs can also be defined by those who live in them. As Gleeson (2006b, p.12) writes, “In North America, ‘suburb’ is direct code for white and middle class”. So are Australian suburbs filled with families and young couples going about their domestic lives, differentiating suburban life from the lives of the single, the childless and the elderly who may tend to live closer to the city centre? As cultural scholar Chris Healy argues, in Australia “suburbia can allude to a barbeque or a lifestyle, to the Hills hoist or the national ethos” (1994, p. xii).

The lack of clarity around the term ‘suburban’ reflects the complexity of the ideas that the language of the city and its various components encapsulate. That this task is difficult is reflected in the absence of any clear definitions in the work of some of Australia’s top urban scholars. For example in a book dedicated specifically to Australian suburban life, Gleeson uses the terms city and suburb interchangeably and at no point does he define the ‘suburb’, nor explain the relationship between the various terms such as city and suburb. Gleeson has obviously considered deeply the meanings of these terms, for example he writes “Traditionally, our suburbs have been marked by relative design diversity (even chaos!)” (2006b, p.12). However, despite such obvious considerations of the complexities of language, his definitions seem to be far more implied than explicit. For the purposes of this inquiry, until stated otherwise, the term suburban is used to denote low density residential areas that form a part of the broader urban landscape. This means that a suburb can be located fairly close to the CBD or on the fringes of the city. The details of what it *means* to be suburban as presented in popular and scholarly discourse and the implications for social practices in the Australian context will be discussed in Chapter Three and Four.

Because my focus is on practices of neighbourly sharing in suburban contexts, it is also important to acknowledge the complex use of the terms ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘neighbours’ across a wide range of disciplines. Definitions of neighbourhood and neighbouring, like the terms suburban and sharing, are contested and complex (Davis and Herbert 1993 consider this in detail). Neighbourhood is sometimes used purely as a geographical term able to be physically marked on a map, other times it is used to refer to ‘place-based communities’ (Meegan 2001). In this study I draw on Healey’s use of the term neighbourhood as a useful scale of studying the social relations of ‘everyday life-worlds’ (Healey 1998; Meegan 2001); the neighbourhood is a manageable slice of the lived experience of suburban life. As Keller explains “neighbouring involves the exchanges of services and information, and personal approval among those living near one another, however nearness is defined” (1968, p.44, cited in Choldin 1985, p. 279). I introduce this language as a practical heuristic for containing conversation about lived domestic experiences of suburban life and in order to later draw on the large body of scholarly literature around neighbourhoods and concepts of neighbouring (for example, see Forrest and Kearns 2001; Crow et al., 2002; Atkinson and Blandy 2005).

A transdisciplinary approach to inquiry

In conducting this study I take a problem based approach to inquiry, seeking to understand not only what it means to share, but to understand the various contexts in which sharing takes place and the meanings given to it as a practice. In doing so, I position myself as a transdisciplinary scholar and draw on a broad range of literature and knowledge production in constructing my arguments. According to Brown et al. (2010, p.4) transdisciplinarity is “the collective understanding of an issue; it is created by including the personal, the local and the strategic, as well as specialized contributions to knowledge”. In practice this has meant drawing not only on a variety of literatures from different academic disciplines, but also making use of popular discourses of sharing – particularly where there exists little scholarly work.

That I consider myself a transdisciplinary scholar does not detract from the importance of discipline based work. As evidenced in the remaining chapters of this work, I rely heavily on literatures and discussion from a number of different disciplinary areas such as urban studies, urban and cultural geography, environmental studies, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Indeed in Chapter Two I describe my analytical framework

based on the concepts of habitus, field and capital, key theoretical contributions of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu himself was open to transdisciplinary inquiry. Loic Wacquant in the introduction to *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992), writes that the huge body of Bourdieu's work "throws a manifold challenge at the current divisions and accepted modes of thinking of social science by virtue of its utter disregard for disciplinary boundaries..." (1992, p.3). The capacity to draw on disciplines while also existing outside such boundaries is what lends strength to a transdisciplinary inquiry.

Like the early urban scholars before me I am also driven in this work by an activist orientation. Running parallel to my scholarly inquiry into sharing are my own experiences of environmental and social activism. During the course of this study I participated in a number of local community and environment groups and initiated the establishment of a local suburban sharing network. The outcomes of this inquiry therefore are not directed at a policy audience, although I recognise the importance of such an audience and the potential value of this work in that regard, rather I aim to contribute to the development of community based initiatives for social and environmental sustainability.

Research questions

Earlier in this chapter I explained that the aim of this study is to provide greater insight into the possibilities of sharing in Australian suburban life. In doing this I first explore how sharing is conceptualised and practised, and what it means to share. I then seek to explore how the meanings of sharing are created, maintained and transformed. Unlike much work on sharing I do not begin from the premise that sharing is an inherent 'good' in social life. Rather than advancing a particular normative argument, my interest is in seeing how concepts of sharing are being used in contemporary Australia. The research question guiding this study can thus be framed as follows:

What does it mean to share in the context of Australian suburban life?

This question is of course both broad and complex. In order to progress my study, this question is broken into the following sub-questions that broadly map into different parts of this thesis.

How is sharing conceptualised in the literature?

What does it mean to live suburban lives in Australia?

How is the practice of sharing shaped by what it means to live an Australian suburban life?

What are the most significant social norms of Australian suburban life that influence everyday sharing practices?

Do suburban Australians want to share, and if so, what motivates this desire?

Thesis outline

In exploring how residents of Australian suburbs understand and practice sharing, and what this might then mean for efforts to realise a more socially and environmentally sustainable Australia, I utilise a qualitative research methodology. Chapter Two explains how this methodology employs Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital. Using Bourdieu's work as a lens for investigating social practices in the suburban field I ask the questions: What does the Australian suburban field look like? What are the social norms that shape neighbourhood interactions? What is/are the Australian suburban habitus and in the context of such an understanding of Australian suburban life, what does it mean to share?

This inquiry requires a detailed understanding of the social, physical, cultural and historical context of acts of sharing in Australian suburban life. I provide this context in Chapter Three, briefly outlining key ways in which Australian suburban life is represented in popular cultural and scholarly inquiry. I explore how suburbs are critiqued for being environmentally damaging and socially isolating and are celebrated as places of personal retreat and rejuvenation. Narratives of Australian suburban life are far from simple, and rather than being constructed of dichotomous perspectives, are in fact a tangle of complex, and somewhat paradoxical experiences and representations. I take seriously the suggestion that it is from the suburbs that solutions to many environmental and social problems must, and will, emerge (see Gleeson 2010).

In Chapter Four I draw on the methodological foundations laid out in Chapter Two to explain the research design and methods used to explore everyday practices of sharing in suburban Australia. I explain the iterative and emergent character of the research process, drawing on adaptive theory, and explain the methods of semi-structured interviews, written correspondence and research journaling as a way of generating data. Chapter Four also provides the specific context of the study, detailing the two

comparative sample populations in Melbourne; the online sharing network the Sharehood, and two Master Planned Estates (MPEs). The data from these two sample sites are analysed comparatively, using ongoing and thematic analysis processes.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the findings necessary to answer the key research question – what does it mean to share in the context of Australian suburban life (specifically for those involved in the Sharehood and those living in MPEs)? Chapter Five offers an analysis of research interviews and written correspondence with suburban residents exploring the social norms that shape contemporary suburban life. I ask, what are the social norms that guide neighbourhood interactions and drive perspectives and experiences of suburban life? It is here that issues of social uncertainty, good citizenship and the role of sharing as an appropriate or inappropriate behaviour are discussed. Chapter Five begins to answer the question ‘what does the Australian suburban field look like?’ as I explore the way in which the practices of suburban life shape, encourage and inhibit acts of sharing.

In Chapter Six I consider the values that drive suburban neighbourly interactions. I look more explicitly at suburban habitus, the embodied skills and dispositions of individual residents, which shape neighbourly relationships. What are the social protocols and expectations about daily suburban life that influence not only the foundations on which practices of sharing will or won’t occur, but also shape the form in which such social interactions take place? The tension between the desire to connect with neighbours and the desire to maintain distance is discussed as a part of the contextual make up of the suburban field.

In Chapter Seven I more directly consider the concepts and practices of sharing revealed within the research data. I do this by drawing on participant accounts of sharing practices, the reactions of participants to hypothetical relationships with their neighbours, and by considering the broader social contexts as outlined in Chapters Five and Six. Interviews and written correspondence with research participants are also considered in the context of popular culture, from children’s books to greeting cards, from dinner parties to political speeches, in which the acts of giving are privileged over the acts of receiving. Chapter Seven also engages more deeply in the scholarly literature on gift giving and the complex relationships between understandings of giving and sharing. Building on Chapters Five and Six, Chapter Seven considers not only what it means to share, but how the suburban field shapes and is shaped by such an

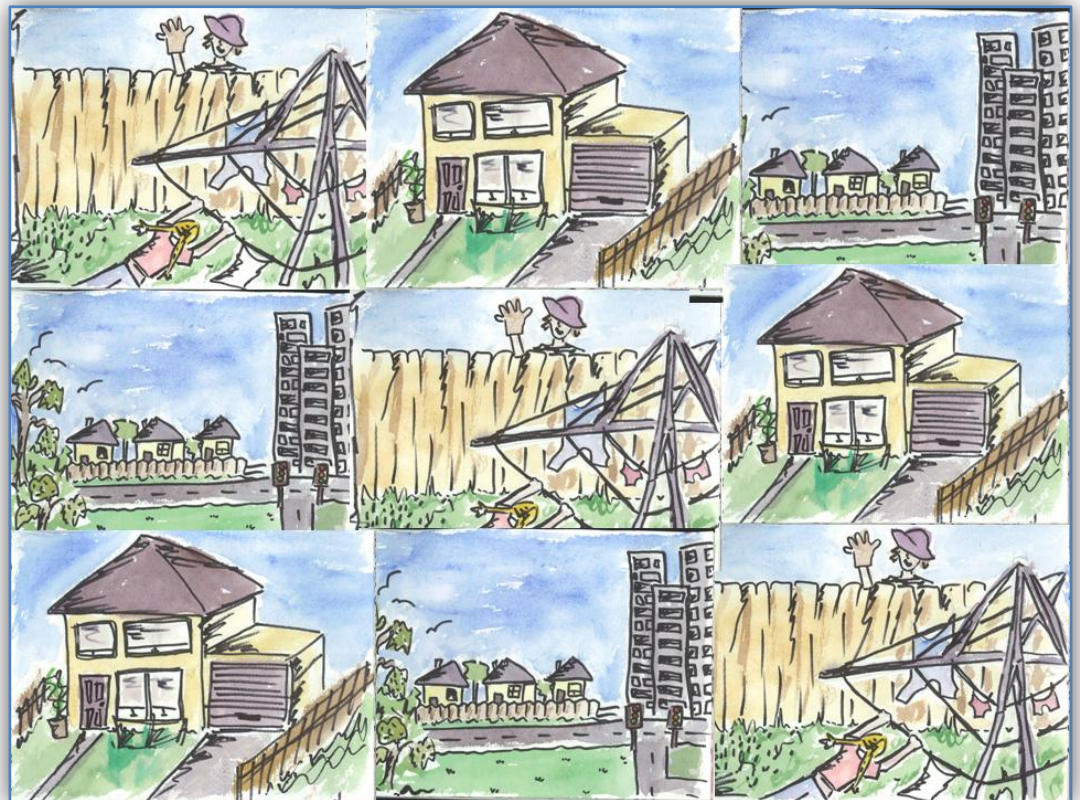
understanding, exploring at the same time the underlying social norms that shape the capacity of individuals to act appropriately.

Chapter Eight draws together the findings of Chapters Five, Six and Seven to consider the possibilities of sharing in Australian life. I examine the contributions and implications of this work in the light of existing scholarly literature on sharing and urban studies, and I offer some suggestions for both individuals and organisations seeking to promote change through sharing.

Chapter 2

Conceptual framework:

Social norms, habitus, field and capital



2: Conceptual framework: social norms, habitus, field and capital

Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake in society, is either a beast or a god (Aristotle – *Politics*).

The desire to belong, and to be a part of a wider social order is one of the ten desires that drive most Australians in their daily practices (Mackay 2010). Australian social commentator Hugh Mackay explains that this desire stems from the need for “companionship, human presence, [and] a social context” (2010, p.153). As established in Chapter One, sharing is a social practice, and such practice takes place within a social context. Thus in this chapter I briefly outline some of the key features of the history of urban scholarship that has addressed questions of social interactions and social norms in cities and suburbs before explaining the conceptual framework I use in investigating sharing. A key part of belonging in any society, to having a social context, is awareness of and, relative, adherence to the rules that govern social practice. Rules can be formalised and set down in law, or they can be understood in terms of what constitutes ‘good’ social behaviour. Formal and informal rules rely on each other. For example, formal rules gain their power through socially sanctioned ideas of appropriate moral conduct. This latter, informal, form of governance is the focus of this study. Rather than seeking to understand the legalities of sharing practices, such as contracts of shared ownership or resource exchange, I explore the collectively constituted and individually embodied norms for sharing behaviour. By focussing on these informal norms I ask not only *what is* shared, but also ‘what neighbourly interactions occur?’, ‘what social norms influence practices of sharing?’, ‘what does it *mean* to share?’ and ‘*why* do people share?’

In this chapter I do two key things: first, I offer a descriptive analysis of social norms, and in particular norms of sharing, in the Australian suburban context. Second, I then establish the theoretical approach I use in order to make sense of the ‘rules’ shaping everyday understandings of sharing. To this end, I turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In particular his concepts of habitus, field and capital and in doing so establish the methodological grounding for developing, designing and analysing concepts and practices of sharing in Australian suburbs.

Social norms

Custom... has rendered leather shoes a necessity of life in England. The poorest creditable person of either sex would be *ashamed* to appear in public without them (A. Smith 1937, p.822).

According to sociologist Elizabeth Shove, social norms are “the sets of practices and expectations that constitute the barely detectable gridlines of everyday life [and which] form what would commonly be seen as a neutral backdrop against which dramas of contemporary social interaction are played out” (2003, p.2). Fehr and Fischbacher extend this definition further to include the prescriptive nature of social norms. They explain that “social norms are standards of behaviour that are based widely on shared beliefs [about] how individual group members ought to behave in a given situation” (2004, p.185). Social norms thus are a set of *shared* expectations about proper behaviour that are created and maintained by social groupings and become a part of the taken-for-granted, habitual actions that constitute ‘normal’ life in any specific socio-cultural and environmental context. In Chapter One I established that in its very simplest form, sharing is a set of social practices (which involve acts of giving and receiving). Any social practice is shaped by social norms and thus a theoretical understanding of such norms promises to provide important insight into how concepts and practices of sharing are enacted in Australian suburbs.

Social norms and urban scholarship

Social norms and their significance in maintaining particular social practices in society have long played a role in urban scholarship. Historically, a key driver of urban studies has been concern about damage to the social norms that support strong social connections, strong ‘community’ as the result of the shift from rural to urban living (for example see Mayhew 1851; Booth 1886; Steffens 1904; Sinclair 1906; Park 1916). In this section I will briefly outline the relevance of the concept of social norms for understandings of urban life, before delving more deeply into the actual concept of social norms.

In 1887 the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies coined the terms *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* as conceptual tools for categorising two different ways of human social existence (Choldin 1985). According to Tonnies (1887[1957]) *Gemeinschaft* refers to ‘traditional’ (village or small town) forms of community, primarily based on familial connection. *Gemeinschaft* refers to communities held together through kinship ties that

are inherited and strong. Such communities exist on common goodwill and cooperation in order to survive and progress. In contrast, *gesellschaft* indicates a modern, primarily urban form of society where, as Tonnies writes “everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others” (1887[1957], p.65). For Tonnies, *gesellschaft* relationships are based purely on exchange. As Choldin writes,

Individuals may have many social relationships in the city, but each party to a relationship expects to get from the other an amount equivalent to what he or she puts in. Contract is an essential of this system; contracts validate the exchanges and state the terms. In the city, each actor is an individual, operating on the basis of personal needs, interests, desires, and decisions (1985, p.26).

Tonnies was the forerunner for later urban studies scholars who emphasised the strength of social norms of collectivity in rural and small town communities, while at the same time deploring the loss of such norms in larger cities. This is not to say that social norms were any less powerful in the urban context, rather that norms differed and were considered to be less conducive to strong community connections. For example, in 1903 Georg Simmel proposed that the social norms of city life were driven by careful calculations about the individual benefits of all interactions. City people, unlike those in rural areas, react with the head rather than the heart. Following on from the work of Simmel, one of the key urban studies texts was Louis Wirth’s 1938 paper ‘Urbanism as a Way of Life’. Wirth argued that the very features of the city determine social relationships, behaviours, and personality and as a result urbanism would give rise to social disintegration. Such disintegration would be directly related to the breakdown of strong community relationships (Wirth 1938, p.24). Wirth’s assumptions about the destructive nature of the urban form were later heavily critiqued by a number of authors, such as Herbert Gans (1967), for failing to take into consideration factors of high mobility in the city and for emphasising too much factors of environmental determinism.

Prior to Wirth’s work Harvey Zorbaugh (1929) argued that the social life of the city tends to make people isolated, lonely and personally disorganised as a result of increased mobility. Zorbaugh argues this was due to *transiency* and “the world of furnished rooms”, where the

exaggerated mobility and astonishing anonymity of this world have significant implications for the life of the community. Where people are constantly coming and going; where they live at best but a few months in a given place; where no one knows anyone else in his own house... where there are no groups of any sort – it is obvious that there can be no community tradition or common definition of situations, no public opinion, no informal social control. As a result, the rooming-house world is a world of political indifference, of *laxity of conventional standards*, of personal and social disorganization (emphasis added 1929, p.82).

The idea that the city holds no sentiment or tradition and therefore is lacking in social norms that make for a 'good society' is considered to be because of "a rate of movement that makes strangers of neighbours" (Choldin 1985, p.17). In this case the occupation of individuals becomes more important than domestic location. As Zorbaugh writes, the city "lacks informal social control based on moral commonality" (1929, p.16), meaning that without shared sentiment and tradition, there can be no shared norms of moral behaviour.

The work of these early urban studies scholars contributed to an understanding that while social norms were functional and long established in rural and small town communities, in cities such norms were dysfunctional leading to social isolation and a lack of guiding morals. Another way of understanding this perceived difference is to examine the language of the rural idyll.

The rural idyll is based on the notion that rural settlements are configured around the importance of family and community (Little and Austin 1996). Indeed as will be discussed in the following chapter, it was this search to maintain such an idyll, in the face of deplorable conditions in the city, that led to the development of the suburb (G. Davison 1995). The suburbs, as idyllic places for families, women, nature and community emerged from the desire to retain the rich bonds of rural living while living in close proximity to the services of the city. Yet ultimately, as discussed in Chapter One and as will be discussed in Chapter Three, there is a deep sense of discontent at the failure of suburban development to reclaim the life of *gemeinschaft*.

Understanding social norms

Social norms are dynamic and flexible, changing in response to differing social, physical, environmental and institutional contexts. In her paper 'Sustainability, system innovation and the laundry', Shove (2004) draws on an historical perspective to bring to light current practices of clothes laundering and the development and changes to the social norms that inform washing practices in modern societies. Shove notes that habits and techniques of clothes washing have changed significantly over the last century, resulting in an increase in domestic electricity and water consumption.

In the example of washing practices, changes to norms of cleanliness have occurred as a result of technological innovation. That is not to say that the development of such technology was not driven by a demand for greater cleanliness, but rather innovation enabled a particular standard of cleanliness to be achieved with ease. Alongside the technological shifts, the social developments and social implications of such changes have been profound. For example, the social context of what it means to be clean has shifted, requiring more regular laundering and to a higher standard of cleanliness. Bathing and showering have also been shaped by various social expectations and assumptions (Shove 2003). In Ancient Rome, bathing was considered a luxury and public baths a place for the wealthy to relax, to socialise and to rejuvenate. As a result large amounts of hot water were consumed by the social elite. In the fourteenth century however, bathing in Europe became associated with the transmission of the bubonic plague, thus people only washed occasionally and as such, little energy was spent on heating water. Socially, for someone to bathe too regularly in the 1300s was to risk being considered 'unclean' and potentially diseased (Shove 2003). Such a perception of bathing is in stark contrast to the way the majority of Australians now view personal hygiene – if the numbers of personal hygiene products filling the supermarket isles are anything to go by. Cleanliness today is not only associated with daily bathing but also requires the use of soaps, deodorants, creams and ointments. Thus, as far as protocols of cleanliness are concerned, in contemporary Australia, to act in a way so as to "maintain the company of our fellow citizens" (Pezzey 1992, p.351) is to ensure regular, and preferably perfumed, personal bathing habits.

The shift from bathing as an activity that posed a significant risk to health to an activity which ensures and signals health not only has implications for resource consumption, but has changed how social identities are created and maintained. In contemporary

modern life, as Kaufmann writes “there can be no construction of identity without the affirmation of cleanliness: to be oneself, to be a self-respecting individual, is to be clean” (cited in Shove 2003, p.148). Of course what it *means* to be clean, indeed the physical manifestations of cleanliness are shaped by our socially constructed understandings of hygiene and dirt.

As social contexts change so do the social norms, the practices and expectations regulating our everyday interactions with others. It can therefore be expected that different social contexts, and changing social contexts, will influence how sharing is practiced and contextualised. In the same way that notions of what it means to be clean have shifted over time, the meanings of sharing today are not necessarily the same as those of 50 years ago, nor will they necessarily be the same as those shaping social life in 50 years time.

Formal rules about anything are shaped and supported, indeed are only possible, because of shared understandings of acceptable behaviour. The limitations placed on who can drive a motor vehicle is one example of how explicit and formally sanctioned laws govern behaviour. In Australian society there are a set of formal rules dictating the processes that any person must go through in order to be legally allowed to drive a motor vehicle. In the state of Victoria, you must be 16 years or older before you are allowed to sit a test for a driver’s licence (Vic Roads 2013). Such a law is enforced through state policing and the threat of a hefty fine. Yet such laws come in to being, and are really only enforceable, because of a widely shared understanding as to what constitutes acceptable conduct (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004). An age limit on driving is generally supported because of shared understandings of the physical and moral abilities required to drive a motor vehicle and shared understandings of the transition from childhood to adulthood. In Australia, there is a social consensus that allowing a 12 year old to drive would be socially irresponsible, posing as it does an unacceptable risk to the safety of the child and other road users.

Explicit laws exist in social and cultural contexts that validate the explication of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours. In turn, informal expectations of acceptable behaviour are also shaped by the ongoing maintenance and presentation of formal rules. Such formal laws also apply to some practices of sharing in everyday life and the most obvious of these relates to the rules around private and shared property ownership as will be discussed below.

Social norms and sharing

There are many different examples that give insight into how the norms of sharing are popularly conceptualised in both academic and popular media. I briefly consider the social norms of private ownership and the significance these have in shaping contemporary Australian sharing practices. I also consider representations of sharing and giving and receiving in children's media and in popular culture more generally. These examples are by no means definitive however they do provide some sense of how the social norms of sharing are publicly visible.

In the context of acts of sharing, it is helpful to think about how notions of sharing, exchange, borrowing and lending are developed through interaction with formal rules. Such an exercise helps to gain a deeper insight into the way elements of social norms are implicitly explained and learnt. An example of neighbourhood sharing practice that is shaped by an explicitly stated set of rules is the local library. Local libraries are formalised institutions of sharing which have been around for centuries. They provide a place in which collectively owned books (paid for by taxes) are housed and can be borrowed for a limited time. To become a member of a library one must agree to the various terms and conditions of membership, such as the commitment to return borrowed items by their due date. The date of items returned is monitored and policed by library staff, and failure to return an item on time results in a monetary fine (and ultimately a retraction of membership). Thus the practice of book sharing, in the context of a library, is governed by formalised rules and regulations that are understood by members.

The particularities of the norms of behaviour appropriate to a library can exist only within a context in which ownership, indeed private ownership, is acknowledged. Private ownership opens up the possibility, the legal right, *not* to share, and thus sharing becomes a conscious practice. In Australia laws which support individual property rights form a part of the landscape against which norms of sharing are established. For example, a part of my acceptance that a library book should be returned to the library comes from the understanding that the book is owned by the library and thus, without the proper exchange of financial capital, cannot be mine to do as I wish with. It is our implicit cultural acceptance of practices of private ownership that supports the formal laws requiring a book to be returned, while, in turn, our knowledge that a book must be returned reinforces our experience of the acceptability of private ownership.

Social norms of sharing in the suburbs

That contemporary suburban life is shaped by both formal and informal rules of private ownership is important for understanding social norms of sharing in Australia. Given that social norms differ according to time and place in history, it is important to consider how social norms of sharing are contextualised and manifest within suburban Australia. The suburban context emphasises notions of private ownership. Indeed in many ways suburban Australian identity was built on the ideal of private ownership. In 1942, three days before he became Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies declared that private home ownership was a “bulwark against collectivism” (Murphy & Probert 2004), establishing the suburbs as places collectively understood as being symbolic of the capitalist paradigm. The Australian suburbs were built on the values of private ownership.

A brief consideration of patterns of private home ownership since the late 1880s reveals the longstanding link between suburban living and private ownership. The proportion of all private dwellings in Australia occupied by owners (outright and mortgaged) at the 2011 census was 69% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). While down from the historical peak of 71% in 1966 (Troy 2003), this level remains amongst the highest in the world and, as recently as the mid-1990s, Australia led industrialised societies in private home ownership (Badcock & Beer 2000, p.2). Often associated with the post-World War Two boom, this phenomenon reaches well into colonial history. Around half of all housing in the Australian colonies was estimated to be occupied by owners/purchasers by the late 1880s (Butlin 1964, p.249), a claim affirmed by the 1911 Census which indicated that 45% of homes were owned outright, with a further 4% being purchased (P. Williams 1984, p.171). The proportion of home ownership then grew only marginally until 1947, before rapidly rising to a peak in 1966, with the vast majority of this growth linked to mortgage tenure (P. Williams 1984, p.171). Since 1970, a period during which home ownership levels have remained in a band between 66-69%, the numbers of mortgagee-occupied and owner-occupied dwellings have remained approximately equal (Troy 2000; P. Williams 1984; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

The link between private ownership and suburban life is not just apparent in quantitative measures of home ownership; home ownership is also a strong theme in recent Australian politics. As Prime Minister John Howard explained in 2005:

Ownership makes a very important contribution to the strength and stability of the way of life we have in Australia and the important role that all of us believe the family should have within the community (Howard 2005, p.5).

Two years later Howard reiterated that the suburban home was an “almost sacred part of the Australian Liberal creed” and that private home ownership “is a big part of Australian making the transformation from welfare state to an opportunity society” (Howard, 2007, n.p.). That the Australian suburbs were built almost as symbols of capitalist ownership, as a ‘bulwark against collectivism’, suggests how deeply notions of individual ownership might be valued as a part of suburban identity and Australian culture more broadly. Indeed as Fiona Allon argues,

Today’s society has been called ‘the ownership society’. This is a persuasive notion ideally suited to the current era of individual obligation and user-pays neo-liberalism, and justifying our era’s fantasy of owning an endless supply of things, stuff, resources. But the ownership society invites us to think solely in terms of assets and asset accumulation, to obsessively concentrate our lives on this to the exclusion of all else. It encourages us to behave as nothing more than property owners, and to view our relationships with others in terms of material values and according to a balance sheet of individual self-interest and calculations of personal gains and losses (2008, p.10).

It is important to understand the broader political context, in this case capitalism, against which suburban identity develops. This context is at once shaped by the development of social norms, but also significantly shapes the norms, and the scope of such norms, of everyday practice.

Over the last 200 years of Australia’s settler history, social norms governing practices of sharing have shifted. Examples of sharing are found in the physical construction of Australian suburbia through the shared labour movement such as the post World War Two boom in building societies. In the Australian context building societies essentially enabled men to barter their labour. For every hour that others had worked on his house, each male member of the building society was contracted to repay the same number of hours with his own labour (Dingle 2000). For many immigrants who came to settle in Australia without family or friends to rely on, building societies “enabled working people

to use their collective means to enhance their individual security and prosperity” (G. Davison 2000, p.59).

While building societies had been present in Australia since the 1850s (and even earlier in Britain), after World War Two they became vital to the development of the Australian suburbs (G. Davison 2000; Murphy & Probert 2004). Over a third of new homes built post-war were owner-built (Frost & T. Dingle 1995) as Australian war veterans, home from the Second World War, were granted land cheaply as large tracts were made available for development. The result was a housing boom in the 1950s and a severe shortage of building labour for housing construction (Timms 2006). The practical response to limited labour was a rapid increase in building society memberships. As a result, many houses in the 1950s were built not only through shared labour, but as a part of a shared vision of suburban life as well (Chambers 1997; Murphy & Probert 2004), an example of the way that structural changes influence what is considered as ‘normal’ practice.

Such a collaborative and non-commercial approach to housing construction is relatively unheard of these days. Searches on the internet for building societies reveal only references to companies offering financial advice. Why is it that in a relatively short time period it is no longer acceptable to seek help from other neighbours in the construction of your house, nor is it ‘normal’ anymore to offer more than superficial assistance in the construction of others’? The shift in social practice, from shared labour for housing construction, to privately outsourcing housing construction, is not dissimilar to the types of cultural shifts seen above in the social practices of cleanliness. Not only did structural changes in labour availability facilitate the shift away from building societies, but the subsequent post-war boom led to a decreasing interest in domestic forms of production and an increasing emphasis on practices of private ownership through mass consumption (Mullins & Kynaston 2000; Troy 2003). As private consumption increased, so too did the need for paid employment to finance consumption, leaving less time available to contribute to collective building projects. Similarly, as labour became cheaper and easier to source, and as wages and employment increased, the need to construct one’s own home, and to assist others, became less necessary. Indeed today, who has time to spend assisting a neighbour to build a house? Would even being asked to assist cause affront when contemporary norms point to paying a professional?

Sharing as an act of generosity

A consideration of children's media also provides an example of how norms of sharing are socially constructed and shift over time. Children's media is one place where norms of sharing are consciously articulated in an attempt to communicate socially appropriate behaviours. How sharing is presented to children reveals a lot about understandings of sharing as they are cultivated in and through popular culture. Although norms become implicit in adulthood, they often need to be explicitly taught to children as part of enculturation. A friend alerted me to what she saw as a change to how sharing was being promoted on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) children's television show *Playschool*, through the story of *The Little Red Hen*. As a child growing up in the 1980s, I remember watching this story being told on *Playschool*. In the story, the Little Red Hen finds some wheat and then asks the other animals in the barnyard 'who will help me plant the wheat?' The animals refuse. She then asks 'who will help me water the wheat?' and again the animals refuse, and so it goes for some time. When she has baked bread from the grain she asks 'Who will help me eat the bread?' and, of course, all the animals say 'I will!' In the original story the Little Red Hen tells the other animals to go away and she shares the bread with her chickens. In *Playschool*'s recent amendment of the story the hen relents and decides to share her bread with the rest of the farmyard. The animals all agree that the bread tastes very good and offer to help next time with the work involved in making it. Intrigued, I asked the producers of *Playschool* why this story had been changed. Their email response, on the 15 August 2011, was "The reason for the change is that we felt it was more in keeping with the ideas of generosity and sharing (which the program frequently models), in hand with a commitment to share in the work next time". In the original story the sharing of the bread was something that the animals could partake in only if they had contributed to its production. In the recent version, the bread was shared only because of the generosity of the Little Red Hen and not because it was earned. The original story thus emphasises common ownership and reciprocal responsibilities. The new version, in contrast, emphasises the personal virtue of generosity. This shift in the emphasis of norms of sharing reflects wider social changes more generally; an increasing focus on personal rather than collective responsibility also evidenced in the decline in building societies above.

In acts of sharing, as represented in children's media, the individually generous act of giving is privileged over the act of receiving. The importance of giving then becomes an

inherent part of how social norms of sharing are constructed in the contemporary context. For example, a quick search of the public library database for children's books reveals a striking number of books on sharing, a large number of which seem to be constantly on loan – a popular topic perhaps! Books like *That's Mine!* (Northway 2010) and *Share Said the Rooster* (Allen 2010) are examples of the style of many picture books addressing sharing. Sharing behaviour, as modelled in these stories, is presented as an act of generosity. In *That's Mine!* the main character William is constantly being asked to share his toys with his annoying little sister. His mum always makes him, but when it comes to sharing his Spotty Cat toy he refuses to cooperate. When his sister gets really sick and won't stop crying, William realises that by lending her Spotty Cat, she will be happy. On receiving the cat, his sister stops crying and William feels pleased with himself because his mum says "you've been the best big brother ever..." (Northway 2010) positively reinforcing his understanding of sharing as being an act of giving. Indeed the act of sharing is not only conceptualised by Northway as an act of giving, but the generosity of the gift is strengthened by the element of sacrifice on William's part.

Evidence of the increasing emphasis on sacrifice and generosity as an inherently 'normal' element of acts of sharing can be found in the National Australia Bank's (NAB) campaign slogan 'more give, less take'. In such a slogan NAB appeals to implicitly understood social norms which value acts of generosity, as a way of selling their banking services. The NAB website states "at NAB, we're making banking better and fairer for everyone. It's what more give, less take is all about" (NAB 2011). The public are invited to share their stories of generosity such as 'tipping the waiter' and these are posted to the NAB website, reinforcing that to give is socially privileged above the act of receiving.

The value placed on sharing as generous acts of selfless giving also be found in academic literature. Stephen Post is the President of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love (an independent academic institute) and Founding Director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University School of Medicine. He argues that giving "is the answer to the malaise that corrodes many lives today, a malaise born of too much 'bowling alone', as the sociologist Robert Putnam describes our fragmented lives" (cited in Post & Neimark 2007, p.2). Post and Neimark develop this argument, drawing in research from a number of different areas to suggest that "giving is more powerful than receiving in its ability to reduce mortality [amongst the elderly suffering financial stress]" and "helping friends, relatives, and neighbours,

along with providing emotional support to a spouse reduces mortality, although *receiving* the same kind of help does not” (emphasis added, Post & Neimark, 2007, p. 9). Some researchers argue that giving is not only good for enabling a sense of personal control and increased self esteem (Krause 2006) but that it is also one of the “processes that integrates society” (Sherry 1983, p.157). This kind of giving is often understood as a ‘pure gift’, that is a gift that is given for entirely altruistic reasons (Malinowski, 1996 [1922]). The way in which sharing, as an act of give and take, is understood in terms of social norms of generosity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

The examples of social norms of sharing, as described above, provide only a generalised entry into considerations of concepts and practices of sharing in Australian suburbs. To date there has been no scholarly work conducted on the social norms of sharing in a suburban context, although a body of scholarly work does exist around social norms of online data sharing (Svensson & Larsson 2012; Beekhuyzen et al. 2011; Skageby 2010; J. Cox et al. 2010). To this end, in the remainder of this chapter I turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concepts of habitus, field and capital in order to understand how contemporary suburban practices of sharing are understood and enacted in the suburban context.

Learning from Bourdieu: habitus, field, and capital

Social norms of sharing are produced through discourse and practice. As shown above, a complex set of factors and influences shape contemporary social norms that, in turn, shape practices of sharing. This description of the role of dynamic social norms in informally governing acts of sharing does not provide insight into how these norms are formed and changed or indeed how they are conceptualised or practiced in the context of Australian suburbia. To explore the sources of social norms it is important to understand the significance of both the material and social worlds. For example, while social norms can help cultivate certain suburban attitudes towards sharing, an understanding of *how* and *why* social norms evolve and develop needs further consideration. The examples of social norms of sharing given above, while providing insight into the character of conceptualisations and practices of sharing, do not provide a useful framework for consideration of the dynamic and dialectical relationships between context and how such context is read and expressed as practice. I now turn to the work of sociologist and cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu and draw on the concepts

of habitus, field and capital, as a way of drawing together analysis of the complex and nuanced social, cultural and environmental factors that shape practices of sharing.

I employ Bourdieu's concepts as heuristics, as devices that aid inquiry, rather than as a fixed framework into which my inquiry must fit. I use habitus, field and capital as concepts to 'think with or about' and as devices which will help to alert me to "new possibilities, new assemblies, new ways of seeing relationships" (Bernstein 1996, p.136). Bourdieu himself was very keen to ensure that his theories and concepts were always considered to be dynamic and reflexive. To follow them as a set of rigid rules or universal truths would be to miss the point entirely (Grenfell 2008a, p.10).

Habitus and field

Habitus is a key concept from Bourdieu's early work¹, which he continued to develop throughout his career, and names the socially constructed but individually embodied capacity to understand and to act on the parameters of acceptable social conduct (Bourdieu 1990b; Maton 2008; Bourdieu & Waquant 1992; Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu explains that "habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of a mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and, action" (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992, p.16). Habitus can be developed and acquired only through experience, observation and practice in a given context, which Bourdieu refers to as field (a concept discussed below). In effect then, habitus can be understood as the human capacity to inhabit the world of social practices. Bourdieu explains that

The agent engaged in practice knows the world... without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment (*un habit*) or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus (2000, pp.142–3).

The world is thus inhabited, through experiences in time, space and culture, by the individual, so as to render the world intelligible and action within it logical. Habitus is the extent to which appropriate behaviour, and the possibility of effective action, in social and physical environments can be learned and practised. Habitus is the practical know how, the embodied, explicit and tacit knowledge which enables a person to function

¹ While Bourdieu has popularized the term and made it his own, it is thought to have originated in the work of Aristotle and was revived in the twentieth century by a number of authors including Marcel Mauss (1935) in his paper *Techniques du corps* [body techniques].

appropriately and well within a given social and physical context. Habitus frames the way in which the everyday world of social practices is constructed and embodied within individuals from an early age, shaping the very way social learning occurs (Dovey 2010, p.32). As the embodiment of sophisticated understandings of socially appropriate behaviour, habitus is a useful concept for considering practices of sharing. Habitus is the embodied, performative and enculturated ground of social norms – and as such provides a helpful concept for articulating and investigation social norms.

An analysis of habitus offers a way in to understanding origins and transformations of social norms of sharing. The relevance of an analysis of habitus can be seen if we return to the social norms implicit in the functioning of a public library. I know the appropriate way to behave in a library because I experienced libraries from when I was very young, observing the practices and rules followed by others, because my parents told me when I was doing the wrong thing, and because later my teachers reinforced those lessons. I also read books which included anecdotes of visits to libraries, friends told stories of library visits and adults expected me to utilise the resource for educational purposes. Thus, due to experience, observation and formal instruction, I know how to behave and what to do in a library to ensure I am acting in an appropriate manner and will be allowed to return. Significantly, I know this in a way that doesn't necessarily require a conscious awareness that I know. Whatever my cognitive awareness, I can act so as to 'belong'; an inherent ability to abide by the social norms of a library. Of course, the example of a library is a simplistic illustration of habitus because it focuses on only one discrete social practice. In reality, our habitus is constituted in and through a complex amalgam of practices, institutions and discourses.

To explore notions of habitus further, it is necessary to understand Bourdieu's explanation of field. Field is the position, the social and environmental context in which social actors operate (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992). Habitus then, is the practical know-how which enables an actor to successfully navigate a social field. Field is the world of practice inhabited by those with corresponding habitus. Thus field and habitus arise together; without a field, a social or physical space in which to be in the world, the capacity of habitus is redundant (Thomson 2008). Habitus and field are co-constituted. Where field describes the "objective network or configuration of relations in any social space or context", habitus is the "subjective element of practice" (Maton 2008, p.49) and neither term is useful in isolation.

Fields can be understood as discrete spaces of practice (Thomson 2008; Bourdieu 1998). For example a church, sports ground, courtroom or public toilet. Indeed they might be 'social spaces' in which the practices of carpentry, medicine, physics or law occur. And any one social context is constituted by a large number of overlapping fields (Thomson 2008), as Bourdieu notes, "the homology between the specialised fields and the overall social field means that many strategies function as *double plays* which... operate in several fields at once" (2005, p.271). For example, I may be standing in my kitchen, in a wealthy suburb, with my Ultimate Frisbee team. Thus the fields inhabited are at once the domestic sphere of the kitchen, geographical positioning of my home, and the socially constructed field of my sports team. Thus the overlap of specialised fields, the Frisbee team, and the overall social field, contemporary Australian suburbia, means that a number of different social rationalities (and social norms) are in play guiding the social norms of interaction.

The concept of field directs attention to the location, in time and space in which practices of suburban sharing occur (Bourdieu 2005). For example, what it means to share in the field of the suburban home (a private space) may be different to what it means to share on a busy city street (a public space) and what it means to share in the suburbs (a convergence of private and public space) today, is different to what it might have meant in the middle of the twentieth century as suggested above. The temporal and spatial constitution of a field provides a context of meaning, complete with a set of associated social norms, by which behaviours can be interpreted and represented. For example, acts of sharing in contemporary Australian suburbs, social spaces in which private ownership is a deeply entrenched norm, would differ greatly to superficially similar acts of sharing in say a Buddhist meditation retreat where private ownership of material possessions is of much less significance.

A field is not just a set of material relations, but is also defined by social relations – a tightly knit relationship between field and habitus. Appropriate sharing behaviour can also change according to subtle shifts in social groupings. The skill of habitus is to enable the enactment of appropriate behaviours, social norms, in different ways in the same setting, according to the specific social relations involved (Bourdieu 1990a). For example if I was in my house alone making lunch and a friend walked past, it is likely that I would invite her in to share the meal. If however, my mother-in-law was lunching with me and the same thing happened, it is very unlikely I would make the same offer. Such a

discrepancy in behaviour is potentially unintelligible, unless the field in which the practice is taking place is understood, in this case, the often more formal nature of lunch with an in-law. Indeed it is only through an understanding of the interplay between my capacity to inherently know and act upon the social norms shaping relationships with in-laws and the context of the suburban field, that such behaviour makes sense. Thus action of spontaneous invitations to lunch can be understood when considered in the field of the suburban home and the practices of power and ownership that shape it.

An understanding of field is important in helping to make sense of domestic practices. For example, in order to understand the statement ‘people in suburban Australia share each other’s beds’, I need to understand a little bit about the Australian suburban context. Such a statement could mean a number of things. It could mean that every night residents across the Australian suburbs are hopping into bed with their neighbours, or it could mean that beds get physically moved between houses. It is likely however, given some knowledge of the placement of a bed, in a house, situated with the contemporary Australian suburbs, that the statement actually means that in the context of family relationships, consenting adults are likely to sleep next to each other in the same bed every night. It is only with knowledge of the field/s (the Australian suburbs, the suburban house, the bedroom within the house) that we can make sense of the activities that occur there. My capacity to understand the social norms of behaviour within a given field, my habitus, is a result of stories, experiences, expectations and observations of appropriate field behaviours (Maton 2008; Bourdieu 1990b).

Bourdieu often uses the example of a sports field to explain how field and habitus, while being analytically distinct, are different aspects of a single and complex phenomena (Bourdieu 1977; Maton 2008). I briefly follow his lead as my own embodied experiences of a sporting practice have been important in my growing intellectual understanding of Bourdieu’s theory. In general, sports fields are differently shaped depending on the nature of the game, and as seen above social fields also vary according to social context. Within this a dialectic is revealed; the field shapes social play, yet social play shapes the field. Neither the subjective nor the objective dimensions of social practice are privileged; rather understandings of proper behaviour are constituted in the interaction of social and physical context (Maton 2008; Bourdieu 1990a).

Many formalised games of sport are conducted in a designated space, the sports field, and usually adhere to regulations regarding field size and shape. It is nearly always

recognisable to many as being the appropriate physical space for the game. As well as governing the field specifications, formal rules of the game will inform the ways any player is allowed to move on the field. Rules will dictate what spaces are considered 'off side' to which players as well as outlining how different players are allowed to interact. Beyond the formal rules, players rely on their practical knowledge of the game, their embodied understandings of how to 'play well'. On the sports field, habitus can be understood as the capacity for nuanced play, a capacity composed of ideas, muscles, senses, histories, desires, objects etc. This capacity forms the implicit and tacit capacity of a player to apply the rules of cricket, rather than football, when playing on a cricket field. A highly developed sense of the game (habitus), above and beyond the formalised rules, is what makes sporting champions (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992) and what enables an individual to act with eloquence in any given field.

Learning to play any field well is achieved not only cognitively, but also by the enactment of appropriate knowledge through the embodiment of practice. For me, learning to play the sport Ultimate Frisbee came through playing, watching others, hearing stories about Frisbee, watching YouTube clips, responding to other people's reactions to the game and explaining it to others. In much the same way that I experienced a gradual and inhabited understanding of protocol, formal rules and embodied knowledge on the Frisbee field, the same can be said for the understanding of social fields of practice and the more eloquently I am able to operate in the social context. Each field carries with it an appropriate state of play; it is no use trying ice skate on a Frisbee field.

If we move from the sports field, to the context of a suburban neighbourhood, Bourdieu's explanations still apply. Consider instead of a sports oval, the neighbourhood street. According to the official 'rule book', the state and federal laws governing property rights, decent conduct, respect for others etc., there are places in the field which can be considered legally 'off side'. For example, no one is legally allowed to enter another person's home without their permission unless deemed by the authorities to have waived this right by disrespecting other laws. Such a law is formally recognised, as written into Australian legislation, but has co-evolved alongside informal social norms of property ownership (similar to the example on page 35 about the rules governing driver's licences). This is not to say that people do not frequently enter each other's

homes. Rather people voluntarily admit others into their homes all the time on the basis of a mutually agreed 'game' of acceptable social interactions.

Bourdieu makes clear the theoretical risks involved in taking too literally the language of 'rules' arguing that,

You can use the analogy of the game in order to say that a set of people take part in a rule-bound activity, an activity which without necessarily being the product of obedience to rules, obeys certain regularities... should one talk of a rule? Yes and no. You can do so on condition that you distinguish clearly between *rule* and *regularity*. The social game is regulated, is the locus of certain regularities (1990b, p.64)

Social behaviour is shaped not by a slavish adherence to rules, but rather to the regularities of social practice that are informally and implicitly learned as habitus, as a result of historical engagement with the field. The ability to play 'the game', to behave appropriately according to the context of the field is related to an inherent capacity to understand the regularities of contextualised social behaviour.

An awareness of social norms, conscious or otherwise, and the capacity to act on such awareness is the function of habitus. For example, entry to another person's home may be granted after a period of time in which both neighbours judge each other to be behaving appropriately, and indicate an ability to play the 'game' of good neighbourliness, well. And of course knowing when to apply exceptions to the rules is just as important; it is acceptable to enter another person's house uninvited if it is on fire and you are trying to rescue them.

But of course, some people do try to metaphorically ice skate on a Frisbee field. Some may invite their friends to lunch at their mother in law's house, ignorant of the potentially inappropriate nature of such an invitation, others may speak too loudly in a library or attempt to remove a book without following the usual borrowing procedure. Such a mismatch between field and habitus can lead to social awkwardness and the experiences of discomfort and it may lead to the invoking of official discipline such as the involvement of the police. The need to play 'well' is thus not just limited to a sports field. As well as learning where I should be on the Frisbee field, I've also been learning the social protocols of a Frisbee player. What are the right words to use when describing a particular type of play? What should I wear when I am socialising with Frisbee players, but not actually playing the game? The subtleties of this do indeed need to be learnt

through experience and embodiment. Yet both field and habitus are dynamic, in that they are constantly changing and evolving as positions and dispositions of social environmental interaction (Bourdieu 1990b); it is this language for dealing with the reflexive dialogue between various factors shaping social practices that adds richness to the analysis of social norms.

Capital

To this point I have emphasised habitus as the capacity to act appropriately and with skill in a social field. However such skill is not an end in itself. As Bourdieu observed, habitus enables an actor to excel in a social field and thus to gain the social benefits this brings. The rewards of a habitus are encapsulated by Bourdieu with his specific use of the context of capital. In reference to the relationship between field and capital Dovey summarises Bourdieu explaining that “the field is a social space which structures strategic action for control over resources which are construed as forms of capital” (2010, p.33). Rather than simply limiting his definition of resources to material or financial sources of capital, Bourdieu introduces the terms cultural capital and social capital. A basic understanding of these terms is important in any discussion of habitus and field because, as Bourdieu explains, capital “is what makes the games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle” (Bourdieu 1985, p.241). For example, returning to the sporting metaphor once more, it is the wealthy cricket club that can afford to buy the best players and the best equipment, thus securing more championships and more funding. In other words, various distributions of capital provide a way in which historical legacies influence the ‘game’ of the moment.

Traditional analysis of capital focus on the exchange of goods and services in a way that assumes such exchange is “objectively and subjectively oriented towards the maximisation of profits” (Bourdieu 1986, p.242). Such discussion focuses attention primarily on things or experiences that can be explicitly bought and sold. Bourdieu (1986) argues that by limiting discussion of capital to economic or material exchange, exchange is viewed as being either self-interested (economic exchange) or disinterested. Yet systems of exchange are far more complex than this simple dichotomy implies. Bourdieu analytically distinguishes between three different types of capital, what he explains as “the set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural

capital and also social capital” (1979, p.114). In Bourdieu’s view all exchanges of capital, economic or otherwise are in fact interested.

Cultural capital

Cultural capital is the collection of manners, knowledge, skill and reputation that is gathered through upbringing and education (Bourdieu 1985; Dovey 2010), indeed it is a kind of measure of, or benefit accrued by, habitus. Cultural capital can be understood in three different forms, embodied capital, objectified capital, and institutionalised capital. Embodied capital is the cultivated, or seemingly ‘natural’, ability to act in a way that shows class or manners suggesting innate understanding and control over social situations. Embodied capital is incorporated into the very experience of a person and finds expression in “physical features such as body language, stances, intonation and lifestyle choices” (R. Moore 2008, p.105). Such capital is engendered in the very bearing of a person, their facial expressions and their very ability to appear like a fish in water, in various social settings. As Bourdieu writes, “this embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange” (Bourdieu 1985, p.245). Thus cultural capital in its embodied state is something that cannot easily be formally taught; rather it must be learnt as it is performed in and through a field of practice.

Cultural capital in its objectified material form can be found in objects and media such as paintings, books, scientific instruments, sports equipment, and dress, and as such can be transferred from one party to another (R. Moore 2008). Yet while the material form of objectified capital can be easily transferred, the capacity to consume such goods is not simply a product of economic exchange. As a simple example, a book may be purchased with financial capital, yet in order to consume the book in its intended manner, one needs access to embodied cultural capital, which requires a capacity to read and understand (either directly or by proxy). In a similar manner, one can purchase entry into a museum, but in order to appreciate the museum as intended one must have the capacity to make sense of, and to understand the collection (Bourdieu 1985). That is not to say that a museum cannot be enjoyed in ways not congruent with broader social intentions of a museum as an institution, but rather that to have access to the shared cultural understandings of the contents of a museum, one must have the requisite cultural capital.

Institutionalised cultural capital is the third form of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu. Institutionalised capital is gained through formally recognised participation in social establishments, for example, a university degree or military rank. Unlike embodied capital, institutionalised capital can, to some degree, be purchased using economic capital. For example, university fees (economic capital) purchase access to a university education (institutionalised capital) (Dovey 2010, p.34).

Social norms, manners, and cultural capital

Everyday manners can be considered as one way to conceptualise elements of cultural capital that is particularly relevant to the earlier discussion on social norms. Using the concept of manners Lucinda Holdforth (2007) explains the importance of social norms as guides for social interaction with neighbours. Holdforth claims that manners may assist in “healing the planet, inoculating us from a police state, restoring our citizenship, saving our marriages, and making our lives richer and filled with meaning” (2007, p.169). While such a statement is perhaps over played, Holdforth’s claim draws attention to a particular embodiment of tacitly understood social norms for social interaction. Manners are one of the ways informal rules are made visible, helping to explicitly guide social norms of interaction. In 1776, English parliamentarian Edmund Burke wrote in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, that

Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in great measure, the law depends. The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarise or refine us, by a constant steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in, they give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them (cited in Holdforth 2007, p.25).

Manners, as articulated by both Holdforth and Burke, may be understood as examples of where Shove’s (2006) ‘gridlines of everyday practice’ begin to emerge more visibly, or as the application of personal capabilities (habitus) and social context (field).

In the context of an inquiry into suburban sharing, understanding that capital is “the ‘energy’ that drives the development of a field through time” (R. Moore 2008, p.105) can help in understanding the forces and factors motivating certain behaviours. The use of the concept of capital legitimises the realisation that social practice, like economic

practice, may be inherently interested and motivated by the desire to 'get ahead'. For example, Askew and McGuirk (2004) use cultural capital as a framework for examining water consumption patterns in suburban Australia, revealing the way behaviours to conform or to distinguish oneself influence domestic water use. Cultural capital can thus be understood as a kind of measure of habitus as it is what provides suburban residents with the abilities to read and enact various social norms; it is the measure of the capacity to thrive (Bourdieu 1979).

Social capital

Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are likened to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition..." (1985, p.248). According to Bourdieu, social capital is collectively owned. Unlike cultural and economic capital which are held by individuals, social capital is capital that individuals can access, but that is held by a social group (Bourdieu 1986). As Bourdieu explains:

The network of relationships [social capital] is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of the neighbour, the workplace or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights) (1985, p.249).

Thus the stock of social capital to which an individual has access is related to the size and breadth of network connections that he or she can draw on, in conjunction with the amount of cultural and economic capital already possessed (Bourdieu 1985).

Portes (1998) attributes the first contemporary analysis of social capital to Bourdieu, although the term is more popularly associated with Robert Putnam's paper 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital' (1995) and his later book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). In Australia, Eva Cox (1995) drew on Putnam's work in her Boyer Lectures, 'A Truly Civil Society'. As a result the term social capital has become widespread. Its popularity can be seen in the countless government reports and research papers (for example, Johnson, Headey, & Jensen,

2005; Mayer, 2003) and academic literatures (Forrest & Kearns 2001; for example Butler & Robson 2001; Fahey 2003; Putnam 2000; E. Cox 1995). However in many of these cases, social capital is often taken in isolation and its relationship to concepts of habitus, field and other types of capital is neglected.

Insights for sharing: habitus, field, and capital

Social norms of sharing, like most social norms, have changed over time in response to social, environmental, technological and economic factors. In Chapter One, I explained sharing as a set of social practices involving the acts of giving and receiving. Bourdieu provides a theoretical framework for understanding social practices in social and cultural contexts. Applying habitus, field and capital to sharing suggests that acts of sharing are likely to be motivated and influenced by more than the simple desire to transfer goods. Instead, sharing is likely to be a part of a complex exchange and flow of various types of capital, driven by embodied understandings of suburban social norms and practice. It might also be assumed that someone who manages to 'share well' will have the cultural capital which will enable them to broach the act of sharing appropriately in body language and timing. They will also have an understanding of the material value of the goods or services to be shared and understand what can and cannot be shared in certain contexts. At the same time, those wanting to engage in practices of sharing would also, theoretically at least, have to belong to a group with strong social capital, where networks between neighbours enable sharing practices to occur. Thus essential to this investigation is an insight into the broader social and cultural histories and norms shaping understandings of, and notions of appropriate behaviour in, Australian suburbs.

In this chapter I have explained the significance of social norms in shaping human behaviour and explained my intent to draw on the work of Bourdieu in order to better contextualise and investigate norms in context. In particular I use Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital as a bridge between the theoretical and empirical dimensions of this study. Looking at examples drawn from contemporary popular culture, sharing in the Australian context appears to be understood as an act of generous giving based on assumptions of private ownership. As Bourdieu explains, norms are embedded within habitus and field, within personal perceptions and practices, and are in turn driven by three forms of capital; economic, social and cultural. Bourdieu's insight that all social interactions are driven by self-interest suggests that the simple dichotomy of rural life as based on community bonds (*gemeinschaft*) and urban life as based on business

transactions (*gesellschaft*), may fail to provide clear insight into the complex negotiations of sharing behaviour (Janowitz 1952).

Bourdieu's work indicates that complex social obligations are not just limited to the rural form. As Greer argues "the local residential community still encompasses some very crucial structures, and therefore has a constraining force upon its members. This is especially true of those who have chosen a familistic life in the [suburbs]" (1962, p.108-9). Thus any study of sharing in any context, as a social practice of human interaction, needs to be done in light of acknowledged continuous capital exchange; continuous give and take of capital.

In the following chapter I describe some of the key ways that suburban life has been experienced and represented throughout Australian settlement history in both popular and academic media. In doing this, I establish more broadly the different ways that suburban life is understood and experienced as a particular social field and the social norms that have developed over time as informing and informed by social life. By presenting these cultural narratives of Australian suburbs, I provide a social, cultural and physical context, in which an inquiry into concepts and practices of sharing can be conducted.

Chapter 3

Accounting for Australian suburban life



3: Accounting for Australian suburban life

I write this from an Australian suburb, sitting at my desk looking out over the neighbouring rooftops to the hillside opposite. Once completely covered with trees, the hillside now bears the scars of new roads and driveways, eagerly awaiting houses to service. Although I live close to the city, I can see evidence of suburban development pushing forward over the bush-clad hilltops. The sounds of dogs barking, children playing and home renovators hammering, waft through the window trailing the whiff of freshly cut grass and barbeques; the quintessential ingredients of an Australian suburban weekend.

I myself am the product of a suburban upbringing. My experience was of an inner suburban middle-class neighbourhood in Canberra. We lived on a quarter acre block. The front yard planted with natives, the backyard a mess of chooks, vegetables and scrappy lawn. Dad relegated the Hills hoist to the back corner and modified it – we prided ourselves on being the only people in the neighbourhood with a ‘sawn off’ clothes line.

Hidden behind the natives, on a large block, it was easy to forget how close to the city centre we were. Five minutes by car, and later, 20 minutes by bicycle. My suburban experience was one defined by playgrounds and old trees, wide streets and bicycle rides to the library. I grew up under the shade of oak trees and on conversations about Gulf war refugees, challenges to the destruction of local bushland for freeways, and the environmental and social problems of nuclear testing. I grew up in what a friend refers to as the Lentil Belt – the home of left-leaning, green voting, comfortable middle class students and professionals.

As a child, and even as an adult, I’d never really considered myself a suburbanite – that was an identity for those on the fringe in new housing developments. The suburbs were those places where divorce happened, where people consumed without thinking, and they were places lacking in history, trees and any kind of ethical social or environmental thought. What I came to consider as ‘the suburban problem’ was nothing to do with me, and I blamed the amorphous mass of the ‘out there’.

The vignette above, outlining my own suburban experience, is thick with cultural narrative and assumptions about what it means to be suburban. In this chapter I describe some of the narratives – the experiences and representations of suburban life – that influence understandings of Australian suburbia. In doing so, I join Chris Healy in asking, “how have images and ways of speaking and thinking about suburbia circulated so as to produce actual suburbia in which people live?” (1994, p. xiv), and add my own questions, as introduced in Chapter One, ‘what does it mean to be suburban and what the implications of this for social practices such as sharing? My personal understanding of suburban life has been influenced by a complex amalgam of factors: lived experience, the physical environment, the values of those around me and the broader cultural narratives of suburban life. These have fed my (suburban) habitus. That my understanding of what it means to be suburban has now changed is a direct result of my access to cultural and institutional capital which have enabled me to consider Australian suburban life in depth as a part of this formal process of inquiry.

In Chapter Two I introduced Bourdieu’s analytical concepts habitus, field and capital as a conceptual framework for this inquiry. In doing so, I established the importance of understanding how representations and experiences of suburban life contribute to the production and maintenance of contemporary understandings of Australian suburbs. In this chapter I thus describe four of the key narratives that contribute to the complex social landscape of contemporary suburban life: 1) suburbs as places of retreat and wholesome living, 2) suburban life as dull and mediocre, 3) the contribution of suburbs and suburban life to the common good, and 4) suburbs and suburban life as contributing to social and environmental unsustainability. These stories are both celebratory and critical and often the very same attribute criticised is, in the very next breath, the one celebrated. The aim of this study is to consider the possibilities for sharing in suburban Australia. What follows is *not* an exhaustive, or intensely critical, examination of representations and experiences, nor is it a direct exploration of suburban practices of sharing. Instead I describe these narratives in order to give rich context and insight into some of the culturally embedded factors shaping suburban habitus, in order to help contextualise and make sense of practices of sharing in the following chapters. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter a key to achieving this aim and addressing the research questions set out in Chapter One is to engage with the field, the suburban context, in which sharing behaviour occurs. I note that while this chapter deviates from an explicit discussion about sharing, this has been done intentionally so as not to pre-

emptively assume too much about sharing practices as displayed through suburban narratives.

Australia: a suburban nation

One of the key characteristic ‘talents’ of Australia is to be suburban, according to public intellectual Hugh Stretton (2001, p. v). Indeed the National Museum of Australia includes a number of suburban icons such as the Victa lawnmower and Hills hoist clothesline in the long running exhibition *Symbols of a Nation*. But why is the idea of the suburbs so entrenched in the national psyche? And what does it mean to be suburban anyway?

The very first town plan for Sydney, proposed in 1870 by Governor Phillip, embodied within it early forms of suburban ideals. It was ordered that the new settlement should

be laid out in such a manner as to afford free circulation of air, and when the houses are built... the land will be granted with a clause that will prevent more than one house being built on the allotment, which will be sixty feet in front and one hundred and fifty feet in depth (cited in G. Davison, 1995, p. 43).

While Graeme Davison argues that Phillip cannot be credited with the invention of the suburb “it is significant that Australia’s founders anticipated a sprawl of homes and gardens rather than a clumping of terraces and alleys” (1995, p. 43).

From the perspective of physical geography, Australia’s suburban form is relatively straightforward and is characterised by low density, detached, private dwellings (A. Davison, 2005). The great majority of Australian housing is suburban, with 69.2% of the 2011 population found in and around the capital cities (and associated conurbations) of Australia’s six states. More than half the population (54.7%) live in just three conurbations centred on Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Not only is Australian society concentrated in and around a small number of coastal cities, it is continuing to sub/urbanise, with the population of capital cities increasing by 17% between 2001 and 2011, while the remainder of the population grew only 11% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). While these statistics provide a basic statement of fact, Graeme Davison argues that there is a “peculiarly Australian habit of referring to virtually any part of the city beyond the central business district as

‘the suburbs’” (1994, p. 7). This might be in part because, as Aidan Davison explains, “suburban form is increasingly difficult to define as today’s cities mingling past and present suburban experiments in complex ways” (2005, p. 6).

While there is disagreement about how residential densities have changed (E. Baker, Coffee, & Hugo, 2000; Chhetri, Han, Chandra, & Corcoran, 2013), and whether urban consolidation has achieved the benefits claimed for it (Dodson, 2010; Gray, Gleeson, & Burke, 2010), it is clear that residential densities in city centres have grown rapidly (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). However, the proportion of dwellings that are flats/units/apartments remains small, increasing from 11.9% in 2001 to 13.6% in 2011 (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002, 2012). Equally, although the size of land blocks has decreased significantly over recent decades and the size of houses has increased (Hall, 2010), the residential densities of Australian cities remain low by world standards (Angel, Shepard, & Civio, 2005). While it is too early to declare Australian cities post-suburban (Anderson, Dobson, Allon, & Neilson, 2006), there is no question that the meshing of environmental and neoliberal agendas over the past three decades has significantly transformed these cities and the sub/urban natures that constitute them (Gleeson, Darbas, & Lawson, 2004).

One of the more prominent forms of contemporary Australian suburban development is the Master Planned Estate (MPE). Despite an increasing interest from urban scholars definitive statistics on Australian MPE development are not yet available (McGuirk & Dowling, 2007). Similarly, no definitive definition of MPEs exists with which to structure discussion (Gwyther, 2005). Pauline McGuirk and Robyn Dowling (2007) argue that Australian scholars tend to define MPEs along a general spectrum relating to the intensity of the master planning. At one end of the spectrum are the conventional planned estates, constructed according to a general aesthetic vision. These estates are often constrained via restrictive covenants determining house design and landscape features. Estates at the middle of the spectrum also include facilities such as leisure centres of golf courses, supporting residents in particular ‘lifestyle’ options. While at the other end of the spectrum McGuirk and Dowling explain that

extensively planned integrated development is frequently complemented by programs of community development and various forms of ‘community compact’ (including behavioural as opposed to design covenants) used to mastermind social interaction and nurture

community sentiment, binding residents and developers to the vision and localised practice of 'community' (2007, p. 23).

Of most significance in McGuirk and Dowling's work is their caution against lumping all suburban development, and particularly Greenfield MPE development, under the one category, reminding us of the diversity present in the suburban form.

Australia's 'suburban talent' is about more than physical form. The suburbs hold a central place in Australian cultural identity. Not only is the term 'suburban' used to denote elements of the physical manifestation of the city, it is also used as an adjective to describe the "diverse, historically layered and ambivalent cultural geographies embodied in suburban environments" (A. Davison, 2005, p. 6). That the term suburban can at once refer to a characteristic of the national population *and* to a distinct group of people living in the suburbs further confuses the issue. As cultural scholar Chris Healy argues "suburbia can allude to a barbeque or a lifestyle, to the Hills hoist or the national ethos" (1994, p. xii). Scholarly work thus exists within a context of semantic confusion. Yet as Aidan Davison argues, "despite this confusion, suburbs are more or less tacitly understood in Australia as an enactment of the Great Australian Dream of affluence, independence, privacy and security: an Anglo-centric dream of certainty in a new world characterised by flux" (2005, p. 6).

Suburban life encompasses a highly diverse collection of material realities and personal experiences. The idea of the suburbs contains many complex and competing narratives which have been repeated and echoed in scholarly and popular media since suburban settlement. In the remainder of this Chapter I explain the four narratives shaping tacit understandings of Australian suburban life. These stories help to outline the hidden gridlines of everyday life, contributing to the development of inherently understood ways of inhabiting the suburbs.

Suburban life: a marvellous compromise?

Celebrating suburban retreat

Australian suburbs are more than a physical phenomenon. From the beginning they have been imbued with a narrative of health and goodness offering a way to develop a modern urban life that was free from the immorality and disease that filled earlier denser European cities. This narrative, although deeply connected to the context in

which the idea and physical phenomenon of suburbia originally emerged, persists in the form of suburban ideals still being lived out in Australian suburbs today.

Despite claims that Australia was the first suburban nation (Horne, 1964), the suburban ideal initially emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1800s as a response to the increasing chaos of industrialising cities (G. Davison, 1995). As a 'Labouring Man' asked readers of British magazine the *Builder* in 1853, "why should not the labouring man endeavour, in the intervals of relaxation from toil, to get away from the noise, and smoke, and dirt of a dingy town, and to breath the purer atmosphere of the suburbs?" (cited in G. Davison, 2000, p. 10). British ideals at the time emphasised the virtue of country life and the suburbs offered the opportunity to be close to the city and all its services, within a country atmosphere (Fishman, 1987; Williams, 1973); the crowded, dirty, industrial and unsanitary conditions made a country atmosphere most desirable. (Indeed it was with an eye to these conditions in the city, that much of the early work in urban studies, reviewed in Chapter Two, was conducted). Settlement in Australia offered seemingly endless opportunity for country living that was close to the city (Timms, 2006). As an Australian merchant wrote in 1834 "I find the advantage, now that my hands are so full of business, of the exercise of coming in and out of Town and sleeping in the fresh air", adding that "without this I am satisfied I could not stand the fatigue" (cited in G. Davison, 1995, p. 46).

Contrasts between the purer air of the suburbs and the pollution of cities, were more than simply physical and were imbued with reference to the purer *moral* air of suburban life. Australian suburbs have developed as the embodiment of what Alan Gilbert dubbed "a marvellous compromise" (1988, p. 35). Not only did they exist at a distance from chaos of the city, they also provided some protection from the unknown dangers of the Australian bush and the Australia Aborigines. As Peter Timms writes "the suburbs cocooned from the city's degeneracy yet safe from the less predictable dangers of the bush, offered a life of modest safety and privacy" (2006, p. 37). Suburbs then became the place to which any aspiring settler could retreat; or to return to the language of Tonnies, places in which community, rather than society, flourished.

In 1909 Frederick Howe, a city planner from the United States exclaimed that, "the great cities of Australia are spread out into the suburbs in a splendid way. For miles about are broad roads, with small houses, gardens and an opportunity for touch with the freer, sweeter life which the country offers" (cited in Gleeson, 2006, p. 10). The appeal of the

‘freer, sweeter life’ referred not only to the suburbs as a place of respite from the city, but also one in which the wholesome family life could flourish. Evidence of this can be seen in an anonymous article in the *Australian Etiquette* from 1885, suggesting that a suburban family would spend the evening engaged in “games, debates, wall pictures, songs, duets, suppressed mirth, and uncontrollable laughter” (cited in Gilbert, 1988, p. 35). Present in such a description of suburban life was the assumption about the types of behaviour that most people, ‘normal’ people, would participate in as suburban residents and the acknowledgement that social interaction would be based on the type of ‘primary bonds’ articulated by Tonnies.

A sense of the moral purity of suburban life continued into the 1940s. This is evidenced in a promotional pamphlet put out by the Merrylands Chamber of Commerce which states:

Merrylands represents a life for which the average man has a yearning, to be in the turmoil of the city and yet away from it all when the occasion arises. In the town of Merrylands life goes on in its even tenor; there is a constant stream of business... the shops are many – gay, inviting but not rapacious. To the city businessman life here takes on a different hue, the spirit of friendliness, of helpfulness is still foremost (cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 88).

Implied in this pamphlet is the contrast between the impersonal chaos of the city and the intimate tranquillity of the suburbs. The pamphlet provides an example of the way that scholarly discussion of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* was mirrored in popular discourses in modern cities that extolled the virtues of country life and the sins of the urban. The assumption here is that the suburbs are places of cooperative and cohesive community in which even commerce takes on a welcoming tone, very different to the greedy impersonal merchants of the city. Similarly, as Fiona Allon writes, after the Second World War “the modern suburb was heralded as the apotheosis of modernity: a social utopia away from the source of all evil and corruption in life, the city” (2008, p. 66). The persistence of this cultural imagery is evident in an Australian study conducted in the 1990s which found that the majority of people moved to the outer suburbs because of the “image of a *new* area, with new, clean houses, and a ‘country atmosphere’ in which to bring up children” (Richards, 1994, p. 117). As with the Merrylands pamphlet, implied within this finding is an assumption about the types of social norms and values present in suburban Australia related to housekeeping and the

virtues associated with country living. This ongoing positioning of suburban life as the reinvigoration of the domestic idyll is a recurring theme in representations of suburbia (A. Davison, 2006a).

Suburban developers continue to offer remarkably similar visions of suburban life. For example Tarneit Gardens, a new master planned estate on the outskirts of Melbourne, entices prospective buyers with images of happy families, children's play equipment, and relaxed recreational opportunities for the entire family. The estate slogan reads "Come and grow with us at Tarneit Gardens" (Tarneit Gardens, 2009). Other developers in the region employ similar sentiment: "Livingston is all about a balanced lifestyle that is both vibrant and down to earth" (Livingston, 2013); "In your new home at Stonehill you will be close to all the comforts of the city, yet breathing in the energising country air and surrounded by restful vistas" (Stonehill, n.d.). Such visions of suburbia belong to a long tradition of valourising the healthful and harmonious qualities of suburban life, and continue to instil expectations about 'normal' suburban activities.

The portrayal of suburban life as a 'marvellous compromise' has been both celebrated and critiqued in ways that have implications for expectations and understandings of contemporary social norms. In the above description of suburban compromise the social norms of steadiness, security and friendliness are celebrated. It is a story of private retreat, the suburbs providing rejuvenating respite from the environmental and moral chaos of the city, and the unknown dangers of the bush. Thus to be suburban is to live a 'good' and 'steady' life. In contrast, suburban life as a place of retreat has been critiqued for being dull, boring and mediocre, and for creating enclaves of social isolation and loneliness.

Critiquing suburban mediocrity

Representations of suburban mediocrity

Man was born a little lower than angels, and has been descending into suburbanism ever since (Crossland 1905 cited in Hartley 1997, p.185).

From the origins of settlement, depictions of suburbs as a 'marvellous compromise' have existed alongside claims that such compromise leads to mediocrity and dull conformity. This theme has its origins at the very beginning of settlement. It was a theme that was brought strongly to life in the late 1800s, in the work of the Australian poets and writers who wrote about the Australian bushmen and by contrast, the tame

and tarnished nature of the suburban dweller (Glass, 1994). One of the most well known examples of creative suburban critique is Henry Lawson's poem *Faces in the Street*, the beginning of which reads:

They lie, the men who tell us in a loud decisive tone
 That want here is a stranger, and that misery's unknown
 For where the nearest suburb and the city proper meet
 My window-sill is level with the faces in the street –
 Drifting past, drifting past,
 To the beat of weary feet –
 While I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.

And I have cause for sorrow, in a land so young and fair,
 To see upon those faces stamped the marks of Want and Care;
 I look in vain for traces of the fresh and fair and sweet
 In sallow, sunken faces that are drifting through the street
 (Lawson, 1982 [1888], p. 44).

In contrast to the rough and ready life in the Australian bush, the city, and by extension the suburb, was viewed as “a trap for the human spirit” (Gilbert, 1988, p. 34). This was the view of many Australian artists and writers at the time. In 1912, Australian dramatist Louis Esson captured this sentiment further when he wrote “[the suburb] stands for all that is dull and cowardly and depressing in modern life. It endeavours to eliminate the element of danger in human affairs. But without dangers there can be no joy, no ecstasy, no spiritual adventures. The suburban home is a blasphemy. It denies life” (1973 [1912], p. 73). Representations of suburbs as places that ‘deny life’ and ‘trap the spirit’ have continued throughout Australian history. In the 1920s Walter Murdoch, prominent academic and essayist, wrote scathingly of what his biographer John la Nauze described as “the awful sameness of Melbourne’s suburban streets, with their red-tiled houses, neat lawns, gravel paths, *pittosporum* hedges” which seemed to reflect a “uniformity of spirit, complacency, a positive fear of originality of difference” (1977, p. 122). Town planner Thomas Sharp expressed a similar sentiment in the 1940s writing

In any case, even if Suburbia had not the fatal faults that it so obviously has in its social sterility, its aesthetic emptiness, its economic wastefulness, where is the point in sacrificing the invaluable dramatic contrast of the two old utilities [of town and country] for some simple neutrality? (1940, p. 54).

What some took to be a marvellous compromise, critics of suburban mediocrity took to be a compromise that drained both the city and country of their vivacity, resulting in a 'half-world' (Boyd, 1952) that lacked its own character, reflecting neither the hustle and bustle of the city, nor the hardy frontier spirit of the bush.

In the middle of the twentieth century, critics of suburban mediocrity turned their attention to the boring and disinterested nature of domestic life – the focus of suburban living (Murphy & Probert, 2004). Much of this criticism came from the cultural elite, artists and intellectuals who, according to Tim Sowden, “seemed united in deeming suburbia the very cradle of mediocrity, a place subordinated by the domestic sovereignty of Australian women” (1994, p. 83). Such critique scorned the ‘domestication’ of suburban man beaten into submission by the dull demands of suburban life. This critique is particularly scathing in Alan Ashbolt’s picture of Australian suburban life in the 1960s:

Behold the man... on Sunday mornings in the suburbs, when the high decibel drone of the motor-mower is calling the faithful to worship. A block of land, a brick veneer, and the motor-mower beside him in the wilderness – what more does he want to sustain him... (1966, p. 373).

That the suburbs were juxtaposed unfavourably with the cosmopolitan nature of the city by Australian intellectuals is captured nicely by Tim Rowse:

It was a contest between two attitudes of life: one whose intellectual horizons were broad, and which liked to look ahead and aspire to adventurous schemes of individual progress; and one that was narrow, self-satisfied, materialistic and parochial. This assumed dichotomy was the property of a certain generation of Australian intellectuals [in the 1960s]... (1978, p. 5).

This particular group of Australian intellectuals scorned the apparent easiness of life in the suburbs – no longer was the Australian ‘man’ fighting for survival in the bush, nor was he seeking further intellectual enlightenment in the cities. Instead, the Australian male was sitting comfortably and complacently under the thumb of domestic female rule. Not only were the suburbs portrayed as “distilled mediocrity” (Gilbert, 1988, p. 37), many Australian intellectuals considered suburban residents themselves to be so “dead spiritually that they could be smugly complacent about their condition” (Gilbert, 1988, p. 40).

Until the advent of mass production, suburban life relied heavily on the suburban peasantry (A. Davison, 2006a; Mullins & Kynaston, 2000; Troy, 2003). Prior to the rise of consumer capitalism after 1945, people used their suburban land to grow vegetables and raise livestock. The women in particular were responsible for the harvesting and processing as well as sewing, baking and the production of other domestic items. These products were then exchanged and sold with neighbours (Murphy & Probert, 2004). After the Second World War many living in suburbia were able to easily and cheaply purchase products that had previously not been accessible and thus helped to fuel the criticism of the suburbs as places of soft excess. In the Australian context, some lamented the loss of the suburban peasantry and the 'do it yourself' mentality that came as a result of the arrival of modern means of mass production. The suburbs, once a rich site of production forming a significant part of the national economy, shifted from being sites of production to sites of consumption (Mullins & Kynaston, 2000). This is not to say that the domestic economy is completely absent from today's suburban existence, rather it is an addition to, rather than alternative to dependency on the formal economy (A. Davison, 2006a). Alan Gilbert summarises the attitudes of a particular element of intellectual thought at the time writing "for the *Meanjin*² school, suburban man was a failure because his mass society – industrialised, affluent and consumer oriented – was anti-intellectual, short sighted, hedonistic and mediocre" (1988, p. 42). Suburban life was criticised strongly as being too easy, lacking the struggles that make life worth living.

Over the same time period (the 1950s-1970s) suburbs were not only critiqued for being places of political conservatism, but were also identified with a narrow and self-serving individualism (Louise Johnson, 2003). Again the artists and writers of the time were the ones perpetuating this narrative. Examples include Barry Humphries' television characters Edna Everage and Sandy Stone, parodies of working class pretensions that manifest as kitsch suburban lifestyles. Explaining this, John McCallum argues that:

Edna and the quintessential old suburban husband, Sandy Stone, were then part of a wave of questioning post-war material comfort and complacency which Australia experienced during the long, quiet, smug years of the Menzies conservative government – years in which Australia sat back and lived happily off the fat of the land, marketing

² A left-liberal journal of social and literary criticism.

natural resources for a living and tending their cars, their gardens and their children, in that order, on the weekends – in the land of the long weekend (1998, p. 206)

In this trope, suburbs in the 1950s were places “so idle and easy that they created a myth of Australia as a land of mindless, sunny contentment” (McCallum, 1998, p. 206). These themes have been continued in popular culture into the present. For example, the feature film *The Castle* (1997) and the television series *Kath and Kim* (2002) represent the lives of suburban residents in terms of a deep satisfaction with mediocrity. In *The Castle* one oft-quoted scene is one in which the mother of the family serves up ice cream. Delighted with what is on his plate her husband asks “Whaddaya call this luv?” Having been told that it is ice cream, from the supermarket, he goes on to say “Yeah but it’s the way that you do it!” The son chips in with “How did you do it mum?” to which she smugly replies “Scooped it out of the punnet”. Such scenes continue the narrative of contented and comfortable complacency, the representations of small and simple delights with suburban life, the development of what Allon refers to as “representations of blandness” (2006, p. 5). Similarly, such scenes also continue to reinforce the gender stereotypes of suburban living that will be discussed below. Through representations in popular cultural media, suburban identities and histories are continually re-presenting and reinforcing assumptions about social norms of suburban inhabitation.

Experiences of suburban mediocrity

These representations of suburban life as mediocre and dull, conjured into being by the artists and writers of the early twentieth century, were also experienced as a reality for many suburban residents. In the 1950s and 1960s, while men were being critiqued for subordinating themselves to the domestic rule of suburban housewives (and seen as being less for it), some women were experiencing for themselves just how dull suburban life could be. In a study about recollections of suburban life, one woman reflected that “It’s not exactly fun looking after two children, doing the same thing day in and day out...” (Richards, 1990, p. 259). The social norms of Australian suburban life, which required women to stay home, providing a comfortable domestic life for the men who returned from work in the evenings, remained fairly constant until just after the middle of the twentieth century. For many, domestic sovereignty was itself an experience of mediocrity, emphasised by its very common and mundane nature. As one woman in Murphy and Probert’s study stated, reflecting on her suburban life in the 1950s, “I can often remember one day, just standing at the kitchen sink and thinking to myself, ‘Gosh

there must be more to life than this...' [Yet] you just got on with your job because at that stage, all of the houses in this street had mothers exactly the same as ours was" (2004, p. 287).

The social pressure for women to stay at home compounded not only the sense of boredom, but loneliness as well. For many women, their role in the home was intensely isolating (Chambers, 1997; Murphy & Probert, 2004; Richards, 1990, 1994). Identifying social isolation as significant, Murphy and Probert asked a participant in their study how she dealt with such feelings; her response "You just cope. I don't know how you deal with the isolation. You just learn. I read a lot. Always had my nose buried in a book" (2004, p. 286). Richards' work also reveals the prevalence of feelings of isolation. As one woman said "I'd go to the letterbox and there was such a deathly silence... really it was sort of frightening" (1994, p. 259). Such studies reveal that for many, particularly women, suburban life was a lonely and isolating affair rather than anything 'marvellous'.

The middle of the twentieth century was a time of changing social norms regarding the position of women in the home. For some women however, changes to social norms were slow to take hold in their suburban lives. One woman in Richards' study recalled that domestic life "[got] to the point where I was very bored and constantly thought about going back to work. Just being able to get out" (1990, p. 259). Many women however were not able to 'just get out' and enter the workforce. Not only were there strong social norms regarding women and paid work, but married women were actually barred from careers such as teaching and nursing until the late 1960s (Chambers, 1997). Often the pressure to remain at home came from husbands, as one woman recalled "No. That wasn't really the done thing in those days you know. I used to say I'd get a job but Doug said 'Oh, my wife's not going to work'. It's amazing how quickly it's changed hasn't it? It's just the done thing to go to work now isn't it?" (Chambers, 1997, p. 95).

It was in the 1960s that second-wave feminism began to have an impact on the social norms and assumptions around woman in the home. Although published in North America, Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) and other second-wave feminist literature laid the groundwork for what was to be a social revolution regarding norms of women in the home and workplace (Lesley Johnson, 2000). While participation of women in the workforce has almost doubled since 1961 (from 34% - 59%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, p. 2) and thus many are potentially less isolated, it also has

contributed to the sense of isolation felt by some as fewer people populate the suburbs during working hours.

The physical isolation of the suburbs

For many women, from early suburban settlement until today, experiences of suburbia are not only socially isolating, but physically isolating as well. The lag time between housing development and servicing infrastructure has long been a characteristic of suburban expansion (Dingle, 2000). However, this became particularly problematic in the 1950s and '60s as the decline of the suburban peasantry contributed to the sense of social and physical isolation in the suburbs. As the suburban fringe grew ever further from the city access to goods and services became more difficult. In particular, after the Second World War, both materials and labourers were in short supply leaving many newly constructed suburban homes without the infrastructure of roads and telephone lines (Dingle, 2000). Many women, lacking the use of a car in an increasingly car dependent urban environment (G. Davison, 2004), were often unable to easily access a doctor in an emergency (Chambers, 1997). In a study on suburban experiences one woman reflected on the conditions of suburban life in the middle of the twentieth century:

Shocking, disgusting. There was no sewerage, no septic tanks, no roads; it was unbelievably bad. I wish I had photos of it. I felt sorry for the people who lived further down. We were lucky we were just up from the main road which was a little better. They used to come up the street here, especially in winter time, and they'd have to take another pair of shoes in the bag so they can wipe the mud of their feet before they could go anywhere... you couldn't just take the baby for a walk. The pram would be stuck in the mud and the rocks (Murphy & Probert, 2004, p. 280).

Being cut off physically from the city had implications not only for access to city-based services, but added to the isolation felt by many residents unable even to walk about their neighbourhoods without great inconvenience. Once again, the marvellous compromise was perhaps not so marvellous for some.

A similar story of physical and social isolation can be seen in contemporary experiences of suburban life. In part this isolation can be attributed to similar challenges faced by previous generations of suburban women – a lack of easy access to the city and out of

the suburb. Peter Newman (1991) argues that the low residential density, characteristic of Australian suburbs has resulted in poor public transport and an ongoing reliance on the private vehicle. While new suburban developments are often connected to the city directly via highways, and while car ownership has increased dramatically over the past 50 years (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, n.p.), many are still isolated. For those without access to a car, often teenagers, young mothers with children, and the elderly, the implications are that they “become locked in their green prison” (Seddon, 1997, p. 152). Indeed, when visiting a number of new suburban developments as a part of this study, I often found myself having to walk alongside the dusty, or muddy, edges of highways in order to get from the train station to the suburban estate. Unpleasant and unsafe, for most people such a long walk to public transport immediately discounts it as an option. Thus, like the preceding history of suburban expansion, lack of infrastructure continues to contribute to experiences of suburban isolation. To live a suburban life, from the perspective of the narrative of suburban mediocrity, is to be physically isolated, dull and boring.

Concerns about growing suburban isolation

Setting gender divisions aside, there are serious concerns among residents, local government and community groups that social isolation in the suburbs is an increasing problem (as discussed in Chapter One). In 2006 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported on three stories in which bodies of elderly suburban residents were found dead in their homes – their absence unnoticed by their neighbours until months after death (ABC, 2006). It was a similar report in 2003 that prompted Melbourne resident Andrew Heslop to initiate Neighbour Day, a designated national day aiming to give people the excuse to meet their neighbours (Heslop, 2011). The enthusiasm for the initiative is demonstrated in the wide media coverage it has received – over the course of 2007 it was present in 95 different media stories (Neighbour Day, n.d.), suggesting that the narrative of suburban isolation has traction.

According to Andrew Leigh, author of *Disconnected* (2010), Australian neighbourhood connectivity has declined over the past 30 years. In the 1984 National Social Science Survey, a team of researchers asked a random sample of Australians about their relationships with their neighbours. One of the questions was ‘How many people are living around here from whom you can easily ask small favours? I mean people you know well enough to borrow tools or things for cooking?’ The average respondent had 7.1 people whom they could comfortably ask. Some 20 years later, Leigh asked another

random sample of Australians the same question to find that the average respondent had only 5.7 people living nearby of whom they could ask a favour. Similarly the recent survey found that the average person could casually drop in on 6.4 people in their neighbourhood while in 1984 it was 9.9. Leigh (2010) notes that there has also been a rise in the number of people who reported that they know no one in their local area, as well as an increase in those people who could not ask a single neighbour for a favour. Leigh's work reflects a change in social norms over time with regards to neighbourly interactions and relations. Those concerned about the increasingly negative implications of social isolation might argue that the marvellous compromise of suburban retreat has gone too far.

Positive and negative contributions of suburban life

National citizenship and the common good

Alongside the marvellous compromise, and the dull mediocrity, suburban life was also considered to be an enactment of good citizenship and contribution to the common good. Until 1902 the right to vote was tied to land titles (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011), and thus the impetus for land was driven by more than the desire for a home of one's own (Jackson, 1984). As a way of raising funds to purchase land, men clubbed together in building societies, pooling funds and pledging labour to assist one another in the pursuit of land title (Jackson, 1984). The linking of land title and the vote meant that notions of home ownership have been linked to the larger narratives of nation building and home ownership since early settlement. An article in the *Argus* newspaper from the mid-1800s is summarised by Graeme Davison as saying that, "by giving [an Australian man] an interest in the state [through property ownership and suffrage], building societies were bulwarks against the 'Levellers, Socialists and Red Republicans' who might seek to overthrow it" (2000, p. 24). The implied message is that home owners are an important part of the national defence against those people who might seek to challenge the Australian way of life and the prevailing capitalist paradigm.

In 1942, in an act of astute politicking, Robert Menzies, the soon to be Australian Prime Minister (for the second time), drew on the longstanding linkage between home ownership and Australian citizenship. Menzies stated that the middle class "has a responsibility for homes – homes material, homes human and homes spiritual" and he argued that with such responsibility comes "a stake in the country" (cited in Brett, 1992,

p. 7). In the same speech, Menzies articulated the link between the domestic suburban home and self sufficiency and independence exclaiming that “My home is where my wife and children are; the instinct to be with them is a great instinct of civilised man; the instinct to give them a chance in life is a noble instinct - not to make them leaners but lifters – is a noble instinct” (cited in Brett, 1992, p. 8). Speaking in the wake of two world wars and a depression, Menzies’ call to a return to the domestic sphere and his celebration that “one of the best instincts in us is that which induces us to have one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours, to which we can withdraw, in which we can be among friends, into which no stranger can come against our will” (cited in Brett, 1992, p. 7), was welcomed by a war-weary Australian public. In these statements Menzies reinforced the cultural meanings that equate suburban life and home ownership with the security of the bigger homeland of the nation, so that by the middle of the twentieth century “owning a home seemed essential not just for one’s social worth, but also for national and economic stability and wellbeing” (Allon, 2008, p. 65).

Many contemporary Australian politicians have followed in Menzies footsteps and narrated Australian suburbs as a cornerstone to national security and citizenship. In 2005 Prime Minister John Howard made explicit the historical nature of the narrative to which he was appealing saying (as quoted previously in Chapter Two):

Governments in Australia over the years and mine has been no exception, have given a preference for home ownership because we believe that home ownership makes a very important contribution to the strength and stability of the way of life we have in Australia and the important role that all of us believe the family should have within our community (2005, p. 5).

Capturing the mood of Australian politics during the Howard years (1996-2007), Allon writes that “it was the ordinary household that was the source of the country’s ability to survive the economic meltdown, right? It was household confidence and buoyant family finances that led to the economic miracle, right?” (2005, p. 53). Allon argues that Howard intentionally emphasised the power of home ownership and shaped his political rhetoric around the suburban home, continuing to provide tax breaks to support the ongoing growth of the ‘mortgage belt’. This is perhaps not surprising given, as indicated in Chapter Two, home ownership in Australia remains amongst the highest in the world at approximately 66-69% (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Howard linked

home ownership not only to national security against unsavoury social types, as it had been previously as a 'bulwark against collectivism', but to idea that national economic security continued to rely on it as well (Troy, 2000). That home ownership and the ability to look after oneself and one's family have been thus valourised throughout Australia's suburban history has implications for the development and enactment of suburban social norms as people strive for home ownership. Indeed the 'Great Australian Dream' is build on the notion of home ownership and domestic privacy (Lesley Johnson, 1997).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was a shift of emphasis within suburban narratives from one of citizenship to the suburbs as being places of common strength, to being places under threat. The Howard years saw a subtle shift from a language in which the suburban home was an active and pre-emptive national defence mechanism, to one in which the home was under attack. As Allon argues "the private domestic home and the national home – the nation – also began to look remarkably alike: they became fortresses inside which we worried about safety and security and protecting our wealth" (2008, p. 2). The shift from the home as a representation of the nation, to nation as a representation of the home meant that:

The potential threats to domestic and national security ranged from indigenous Australian's seeking Native Title rights (threatening our backyards), illegal immigrants (coming in the back door), terrorists (on our doorsteps) and, most recently interest rate rises (menacing our mortgages). Along with these spotlighted dangers there emerged an intangible but pervasive sense of fear and insecurity (2008, p. 149).

Allon's comments reveal a subtle shift from the suburban home as a place of *retreat* from the dangers of the city and the threats of the bush, to being the very place under attack. The strength of the suburb as a defence mechanism against common threat has become less visible as the threats to home become more individually focussed.

The suburban sustainability problem

[The Australian suburb] overemphasises the private, individualised world at the expense of the commons. It provides for private splendour in our houses and backyards and in our cars, but public squalor in our air and water, at the urban fringe it falls under the subdivision's bulldozers, in the global environment due to greenhouse, in the feeble attempts at community which characterise our suburbs, and in our

public transport which is allowed to run down and become vandalised
(Newman, 1991, p. 20).

In contrast to representations of suburban life as contributing to the common good, suburbs are criticised as being environmentally problematic in two ways: they contribute directly to destruction of environment through the process of sprawl; and they are filled with people culturally driven by the social imperative to consume. As Hartley explains, “environmentally, the suburbs are vilified for sprawling all over the countryside, filling it up with tarmac, cars, and concrete while encouraging its inhabitants to live lifestyles oozing with garbage, plastic, toxins and tins” (1997, p. 184).

The relatively low population density of Australian cities has been cause for much academic and popular debate regarding the environmental (un)sustainability of the suburban form (Buxton & Tieman, 2005; Newman, 1999; Troy, Holloway, Pullen, & Bunker, 2003). The issue of density and sprawl has long been a part of Australian suburban history (G. Davison, 2013). Graeme Davison explains that

Like the suburb, ‘sprawl’—literally ‘an awkward or clumsy spreading of the limbs’—was an idea that originated in London where, by the 1930s, unplanned ribbon development on the fringes of the metropolis had begun to draw the fire of architects and planners. It conjured the image of a lazy, ill-mannered, inconsiderate invader of other people’s space, an offender against good manners, a careless steward of the national heritage (2013, p. 12).

The first reference to the language of suburban sprawl is thought to be in Clough Williams’ 1928 publication *England and the Octopus* (G. Davison, 2013, p. 12). In a sense, the physical manifestations of suburban sprawl were symbolic of a transgression of social norms of politeness. English town planner, Thomas Sharp, critic of Australian suburbs exclaimed:

Now, suburbia... is socially sterile... it involves its inhabitants in a great waste of time and money and energy in journeying to and fro... and especially... it’s spreading the means of eating up great areas of valuable agricultural land and the banishment of the countryside. Suburbia is essentially selfish and anti-social in this respect (1940, p. 53)

In making such an observation, he linked notions of sprawl to social sterility and selfishness – transgressions of norms of politeness – and to environmentalist concerns

with sprawl. Indeed it is at this point that the relevance of the suburb as a fitting place for an exploration of social norms of sharing becomes apparent. Sharing initiatives are advocated by proponents as ways to both reduce consumption *and* to create social bonds.

Most relevant to this inquiry is the increasingly vocal nature of critics of suburban sprawl from around the mid-twentieth century when Robin Boyd first asked “will not our big cities choke themselves out like over- stimulated weeds? How far can a man travel each day? How thinly will city amenities spread? How dull can life become?” (1952, p. 115). Sprawl then is not simply a critique of physical form but is understood to embody all that is wrong with suburban life, a kind of shorthand for summing up the perceived social and environmental failings of the suburbs (A. Davison, 2006a). The environmentally problematic nature of suburban sprawl is thus an important part of contemporary environmentalist suburban critique.

Work by Australian scholar Aidan Davison reveals the link between suburban critique and the ideas embedded within the language of sprawl. In interviews with members of two major environmental groups (The Greens and The Wilderness Society), and members of local environmental groups, Davison found that the “majority of participants considered suburban development, past and present, especially in the largest cities, to be the principal threat to the ecological sustainability of Australian cities” (2006a, p. 6). Comments made by environmentalists in Davison’s study included: “within our sprawling, sprawling cities we are just destroying everything in our path” and “if we are going to come to terms with our impact on the Australian environment, somehow we have got to stop the sprawl of those five [biggest] cities” (2006a, pp. 6–7). What is particularly interesting about Davison’s work is that most of his participants themselves were suburban. Aidan Davison concludes that

despite decrying suburban aspirations and suburban sprawl as another instance of human pestilence in nature, many [environmentalists] seemed engaged in a careful, deliberate and skilled maintenance of a sense of being at home in both society and in suburban settings (2008, p. 1294)

As Graeme Davison explains, many critics have late come to realise that they themselves are suburban and that “rather than surrender their disapproval, they may prefer to detach ‘suburbia’ – a metonym for a loathed way of life – from the geographical realities

of the suburb” (2013, p. 14). For many Australians an important part of suburban habitus is to *not* identify as suburban.

Gleeson (2010) also argues that a key part of the environmentalist critique of suburban life has been related to the idea that low-density housing is synonymous with waste and pollution. As children of the post-war boom of the 1950s, many environmentalists would have seen first-hand the conversion of wild open countryside to the regimented streets of new housing developments (A. Davison, 2006a). It is perhaps in part because of this observation, so beautifully captured in Jeanie Bakers’ classic children’s book *Window* (1991), that the suburbs have come to represent much of what is wrong in the world: the onward march of progress into nature’s fields of play. In the context of environmentalist perspectives emerging around the time of the Club of Rome’s *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, 1972), many suburban residents would have had visual proof of the limited capacity for eternal growth.

The anti-suburban stance of many environmentalists is intriguing given that the modern environmental movement grew out of the suburbs (A. Davison, 2006b; Gilbert, 1988). Groups such as urban Landcare and permaculture found their heartlands in the Australian suburbs, yet the anti-suburban sentiment is visibly present. For example, David Holmgren, co-originator of the permaculture concept writes:

The suburbs of our Australian cities have, in the main, become sterile wastelands, lacking in any true community spirit, impoverished of local resources, and filled with fearful people whose daily efforts are focussed elsewhere (2005, p. 1).

While Holmgren’s work is aimed at retrofitting suburbs for sustainability, the nature of his writing is such that it dismisses the physical and social resources already in place in suburban Australia and in effect, belittles the lives of its occupants.

Suburbs are considered environmentally problematic not only because of their propensity for sprawl, but because they are viewed by some as being the embodiment of overconsumption. In doing so, critics draw on the experiences and representations above that paint suburban life as bland and mediocre. Allon (2006) examines this by considering recent magazine and newspaper references to the Australian suburbs. Many of the articles refer to ‘the suburbs’ as being places of “poverty of spirit and barrenness

of mind” (2006, p. 4). For example, writing in the weekend magazine of major Sydney newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, journalist Janet Hawley writes

That’s the rationale behind the new suburbia, complete with triple garages, faux facades and tiny backyards... join the mad race to buy a bulldozed-bare, handkerchief sized lot, lay a concrete slab, build a cavernous trophy home in 20 weeks, and settle into the new heartland of the aspirational voter (2003, p. 23).

This race to consume the Great Australian Dream is noted by Roger Silverstone who writes that “suburban culture is a consuming culture. Fuelled by the increasing commoditisation of everyday life, suburbia has become the crucible of the shopping economy” (1997, p. 8). Such commentary builds on the critique of suburban consumption from the 1950s, although the critique has shifted from emphasising the dull complacency of consumption, to the environmentally damaging nature of the practice. Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss (2005) identify an apparent suburban obsession with consumption, linking an epidemic of stress and overwork with the pursuit of the great Australian dream and an idealised life of suburban ease. Hamilton and Denniss coin the term ‘affluenza’ and link it directly to the desire for a particular type of suburban living. They write “affluenza is an epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by the dogged pursuit of the Australian dream” (2005, p. 3).

Representations of suburban overconsumption are incredibly powerful in the statements they make about the social norms and behaviours of suburban residents. So powerful are such narratives that judgements and stories about suburban life are perpetuated as ‘truth’, despite evidence that might suggest otherwise. Brendan Gleeson supports the need for discussion that shifts away from the divisive suburban narratives which “tend to freeze suburbia in time; either as eco-villain, the contemporary ‘McMansion’ (large house, small lot) or as nostalgic hero, the White picket heartland from which flowed a pure river of human improvement” (2008a, p. 2656). Similarly, Robyn Dowling and Emma Power comment that “in some popular culture and some academic commentary, these houses [primarily in new Master Planned Estates] are represented as over users of energy, and their inhabitants cast as selfish and consumer driven” (2011, p. 75), even though very little research on household sustainability in outer suburbia has been conducted. Perhaps in part because of this, Gleeson (2008) argues that environmental critiques are often built on poor science. As Aidan Davison

argues, the suburbs are often “a convenient scapegoat in Australian discussion about urban sustainability” (2006a, p. 202). That is not to say that the Australian way of life does not contribute significantly to environmental problems, rather that the simplification that paints suburban life as inherently unsustainable and ‘bad’ is problematic.

The Australian Conservation Foundation’s (ACF) Consumption Atlas (ACF, 2007) is one of the few studies into suburban consumption that challenges the narrative of suburban unsustainability. The ACF argues that, based on a relatively new ‘whole of life’ analysis of resource consumption, “despite the lower environmental impacts associated with car use, inner city households outstrip the rest of Australia in every other category of consumption” (2007, p. 10). The findings point to much higher consumption levels in the inner city than in the outer suburbs – suburbs that bear the brunt of the criticism of the sustainability problem. Higher levels of consumption in the inner suburbs were based on higher levels of wealth and environmental impacts of more frequent overseas holidays and other types of resource intensive recreation. The ACF acknowledges that “the profiles [maps, analyses etc]... are challenging for individuals as well as governments seeking environmental change” (2007, p. 4). That such findings might be considered challenging speaks to the strength of the narrative that locates suburban life so firmly as the “root and trunk” of the sustainability crisis (Gleeson, 2008). I am not interested here in the science of suburban consumption, rather I offer the ACF findings here as an example of the strength of the narrative that paints (outer) suburban life as the key culprit of the sustainability crisis.

Shaping contemporary suburban life

In this chapter I have described some of the key suburban narratives, derived from experience, cultural representations and scholarly critique, which contribute to contemporary understandings of suburban life. Each of the four main narratives, retreat, mediocrity, contribution to common good, and environmentally and socially damaging, exist in a complex relationship to the others. Gilbert argues “like personal histories of the people and families who compose them, suburbs are complex, varied and often contradictory social systems” (1988, p. 35). Similarly, Askew and McGuirk explain that “Contemporary literature on suburbia suggests the socio-cultural structuring of a suburban habitus is based on seemingly contradictory, complex combinations and

interactions of social distinction (e.g. physical and symbolic barriers) and social conformity (e.g. familial values, home ownership)” (2004, p. 20).

The experiences of suburban residents are not just limited to one of the categories above, rather the habitus of suburban life is a complex and paradoxical mix of many of the cultural representations and experiences of suburban life. For example, the ideal of suburban rest and retreat by its very nature must be calm and predictable, the very ingredients for dull mediocrity. Similarly, if retreat means not just retreat from city busyness, but retreat from social life altogether, suburban isolation is a potential consequence. Many contemporary discussions of environmentalism promote suburbs as sites for contributing to the sustainability problem, while others seek solutions in suburban life. For example, Gleeson argues in *Lifeboat Cities* (2010) that it is our cities and our suburbs that hold the greatest hope for coping with oncoming environmental crisis. These narratives do not necessarily have to be based on ‘truth’ or actual experience. Graeme Davison argues that “The suburb has a claim to being one of the most successful and least loved inventions of the modern era” (2013, p. 1) and that “even its friends are seldom more than half-hearted while its enemies are more inclined... to sneer than to analyse” (2013, p. 2). Yet this un-critical sneering has shaped Australian suburban identities as much, if not more than stories of celebration and shows the power of cultural narrative in perpetuating stories that may differ from the realities of the material world. The various accounts and representations of suburban life above implicitly communicate and reinforce particular social norms. This occurs as a result of the continual re-presentation of images of what suburban life is like.

The purpose of presenting this collection of cultural narratives and personal experiences about Australian suburban life has been to provide an insight into forms of cultural capital that shape contemporary inhabitation and enactments of suburban life. As Gwen van Eijk writes in her paper on neighbouring practices, “neighbours engage in friendly relations while boundaries, differences and stereotyping remain intact, and this is what makes relations so complicated and disentangling narratives and practices so essential” (2012, p.3013). The ability of an individual to understand suburban life, and their capacity to engage in socially appropriate practices, stems not only from personal experience but from popular and academic narratives of Australian suburbs. Such resources, derived from various forms of habitus, contribute to the development of stocks of cultural capital which shape an individual’s ability to navigate the suburban

social field. Bourdieu's consideration of scientific capital, a form of cultural capital, helps to make sense of this as he argues that "a twenty year old mathematician can have twenty centuries of mathematics in his head" (2004 [2001], p. 40). Similarly, knowledge of suburban life is founded on several hundred years of cultural narrative, history and experience in a distinctly Australian context. These narratives shape understandings and capacities for inhabiting the fields of Australian suburban life.

This chapter has brought into view the broad social context in which Australian suburban life is positioned, helping to answer the question 'what does it mean to live a suburban life in Australia?' This overview of competing cultural narratives that have shaped both the representation and the reality of suburban life in Australia provides insight into the cultural capital that circulates within contemporary social practices. While not focussed on sharing *per se*, this discussion has identified a number of deeply ingrained social norms that potentially impact and influence sharing behaviour.

That the suburbs were (and are) viewed as a compromise between the weak and mercenary bonds of the city (*gesellschaft*) and the strong kinship bonds of the country (*gemeinschaft*) has implications for how we can understand sharing behaviour. The suburbs have been in part defined as places in which sharing behaviour, or at least Sahlins' generalised reciprocity, becomes idealised and anticipated. Thus the suburbs are places where sharing at the level of local community becomes expected (whether or not it occurs is another matter). One might expect to find those living in suburbs, especially those who experience isolation and loneliness, to actively seek to develop reciprocal bonds.

On the other hand, representations of suburban life as mediocre and disinterested suggest that sharing behaviours are unlikely to be found in suburbs. As a result of the selfish focus of residents, based on an obsession with personal comfort, choice, ownership and autonomy, some may expect sharing to be off the agenda in the suburban context. Indeed if the over-riding goal of suburban life is to be inwardly focussed on personal comfort, then perhaps individuals will be less likely to seek sharing relationships for fear of transgressing existing norms of interaction.

The discussion above of suburbs as contributing to the common good of the nation also has implications for the way that sharing may be understood and experienced. For example, one could argue that to partake in the protection of a nation, culturally,

economically and/or socially, is to partake in an act of sharing at a grand scale. This may conceivably make those who feel they are participating more likely to share with their neighbours – enhancing their sense of contribution to the common good – or less likely to share with neighbours feeling that they have already ‘done their bit’.

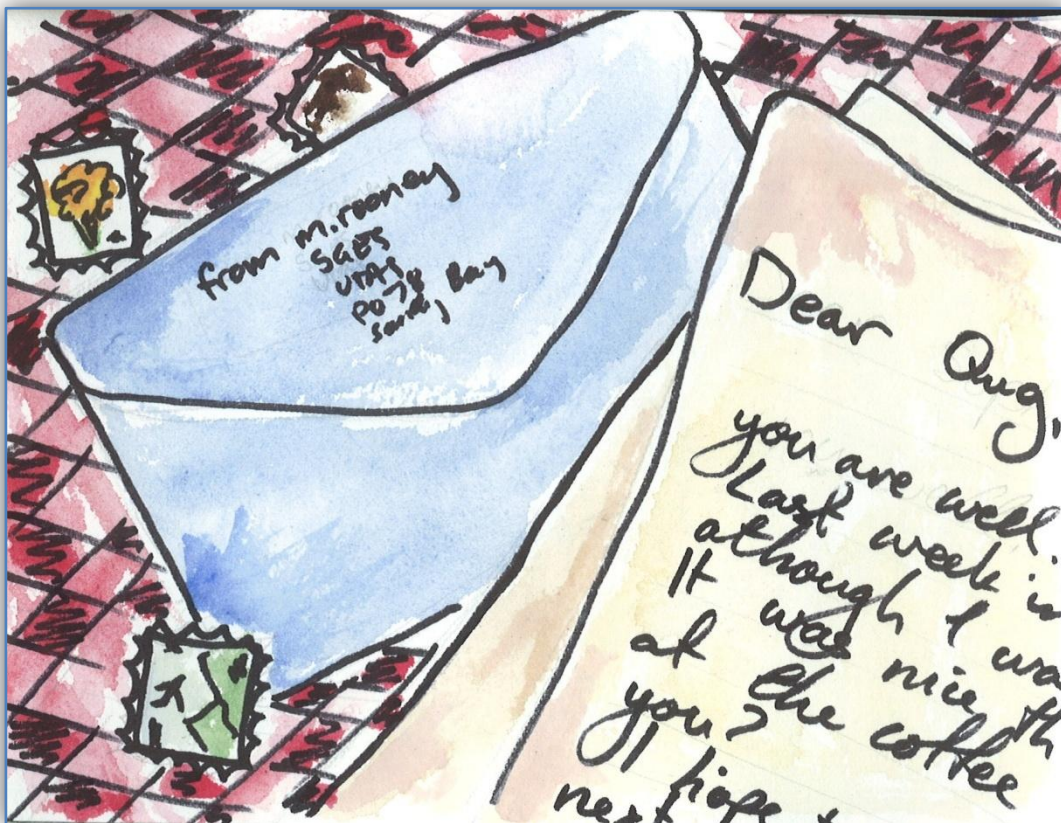
Finally, the discussion of the suburbs as places that are inherently unsustainable returns us to Chapter One and the very reason that sharing is often promoted – as a solution to overconsumption and the environmental tragedies that follow from that. By telling this particular narrative I hope to have revealed the deeply rooted cultural assumption with which many proponents of suburban sharing approach their advocacy of sharing programs – the notion that sharing is an inherently ‘good’ act, in a landscape that needs salvation.

The representations and realities of suburban life presented in this chapter help to provide insight into the building blocks, assumptions and expectations about Australian suburban life, creating as they do an insight into suburban cultural capital. The diverse realities of suburban life are constructed in complex ways via the different narratives and norms. As such they have a bearing on the way sharing is conceived and practised by suburban residents. Thus in the next chapter I outline the methods I used to investigate what it means to be suburban in contemporary Australia and, ultimately, the implications of this for what it means to share.

Chapter 4

Research design:

An adaptive approach



4: Research Design: An adaptive approach

Sharing is a complex set of social relations that bring together objective and subjective phenomena. By introducing social norms, and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field in Chapter Two, I established an implied epistemological and ontological position and argued for the importance of contextualising understandings of phenomena. In Chapter Three I described the complex and sometimes contradictory narratives of Australian suburban life, the field in which the practices and conceptualisations of sharing in this inquiry take place and the stories that shape the habitus of suburban practice. In doing so I asked how can it be that for some, suburban Australia is cause for celebration, while for others it is considered problematic? Even more confusingly, how can these varying accounts of Australian suburban life emerge from not only people in different suburbs, but from people in the same street? Indeed the contrasts and contradictions may be embodied in the understandings of a single individual. While the narratives of Australian suburban life presented in Chapter Three provide insight into everyday life, they fail to translate into meaningful understanding of what it *actually* means to live a suburban life in contemporary Australia. As a result, in order to fully address the research questions posed in Chapter One, an empirical approach to enquiry is required. With this understanding, I now turn to the development of methodology and method to enable a deeper understanding of what it means to share in Australian suburban life. First I more explicitly outline my position as a social constructionist and explain how I have drawn on an adaptive and iterative approach to research design. I then outline the two comparative study populations, before explaining the methods used to elicit and analyse qualitative responses.

The aim of this study is to provide insight into the possibilities for sharing in the Australian suburbs by answering the question what does it mean to share?' In order to answer this question I also posed a number of sub-questions: What does it mean to live suburban lives in Australia? How is the practice of sharing shaped by what it means to live an Australian suburban life? What are the most significant social norms of Australian suburban life that influence everyday sharing practices? And do suburban Australians want to share, and if so, what motivates this desire?

These questions require an empirical approach that allows not only questions such as ‘do people want to share’, but to delve deeper into understanding what the social and cultural factors are that shape sharing capacity. Some of these questions can begin to be answered as a result of literature review in the previous chapter. However in order to deeply understand sharing as it is conceptualised and practised *within a specific context* (and thereby make use of Bourdieu’s contextualised approach to inquiry), most require empirical work. As a result in this chapter I explain not only my methodological stance, but the practical methods I employed to gather data that was rich in detail. Such detail enabled an analysis not only of explicitly articulated perspectives on sharing, but cast a net broad enough to gather insight into the suburban field, habitus, and capital, of everyday suburban practice as it relates to sharing.

Social constructionism and qualitative inquiry

This research is positioned on the spectrum of social constructionist methodologies. Such a methodological orientation validates my conceptual entry into this inquiry via the use of social norms and Bourdieu’s habitus, field and capital. Social constructionism is an epistemological position that holds that knowledge is constructed through relationships and interactions between people and things (M. Gergen & K. J. Gergen 2003). According to Crotty, constructionism is “the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social world” (1998, p.42). Or as Gergen and Gergen write “what we take to be true as opposed to false, objective as opposed to subjective, scientific as opposed to mythological is brought into being by historically and culturally located groups of people” (2003, p.2). No one answer can be discovered, rather many truths can be constructed (Willig 2001).

Social constructionism is positioned in contrast to more positivist understandings of the world. A positivist approach to an inquiry on suburban sharing would be based on the assumption that human behaviour can be understood in terms of cause and effect (May 2001). Positivist approaches are thus more inclined towards quantitative methodologies. For example, it may entail an attempt to quantify just how much sharing happens in a certain neighbourhood. To do this requires an assumption that there is a true definition of what it means to share and that such an activity is recognisable as the same thing by

everyone. This is not to say that one cannot conduct qualitative work from a positivist position. It does however assume that by asking a series of logical questions, rational answers will be found and a hypothesis proved or disproved and that the researcher remains at an objective distance (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

A social constructionist approach on the other hand, sets out not to prove that 'people do not like to share', but rather 'what is the meaning of sharing?' and 'how is sharing experienced, explained and practised by people inhabiting Australian suburban life?' Such questions assume that there is no one single, essential truth that can be uncovered. Rather this form of inquiry assumes that sharing is a created through relationships that can be understood by a "focus on broader social processes and... emphasis on the importance of social, political and economic context" (Jacobs et al. 2004, p.3). I am more interested in how, and why, practices and conceptualisations of sharing might be considered valid than the number of times things are shared (Liebrucks 2001, p.367).

In seeking to understand the 'how' and the 'why' of sharing practices, I necessarily adopt a qualitative approach to inquiry (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). Jennifer Mason explains that

Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of meanings that they generate (2007, p.1).

In this inquiry I seek to understand the unspoken social norms that shape concepts and practices of sharing and to gain insight into how habitus of Australian suburban life shapes practices of sharing and neighbourly interaction. As Ritchie suggests, "the open and generative nature of qualitative methods allow the exploration of such issues without advance prescription of their construction or meaning as a basis for further thinking about policy or theory development" (2003, p.32). A qualitative approach provides scope for phenomena previously not considered to emerge.

There are many different ways of conceptualising 'good' qualitative research. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) suggests that it requires a formal process of reflexivity. Penman (2000) argues for 'faithful narratives', while Shotter (1996) claims that good qualitative researchers need to be "answerable for our own unique position in the world, and to

have it make a difference in the world we share with others” (Shotter 1996, p.123). To utilise the analysis of Bourdieu, this is to say that the habitus and field of the researcher is different to those of the researched. By acknowledging and reflecting on this difference, richer understandings of practice can be developed. To capitalise on these differences, and to build reflexivity into research design, I draw on adaptive theory as a methodological strategy for inquiry.

An adaptive research design

In undertaking an investigation into conceptualisations and practices of sharing I employ a methodological strategy congruent with Bourdieu’s ontological stance. There are a number of strategies I could have drawn on to help guide an iterative and emergent research design, such as hermeneutics or grounded theory (Ezzy 2010). While either of these approaches would have been suitable, I make use of Derek Layder’s adaptive theory as it provides a neat strategy for making visible the continually dialogical nature of the research process between the researcher, research participants, research field (as grounded in place) and research field (as it exists within academic literature).

Adaptive theory has two key elements that make it a useful and relevant methodological strategy for this work. First, it accepts iterative movement between micro and macro scales, allowing for both subjective insight into social interaction on the ‘ground’ (the lived experience of research participants), while at the same time integrating insight into the broader social and physical context in which such practices take place (Layder 1998). In Layder’s terms this is to be alive to the relationships between “‘social settings’ and the ‘situated activities’ that take place within them” (1998, p.156). Such an approach to inquiry is important in seeking to answer questions about social norms and cultural context of Australian suburban life. An adaptive approach accommodates the notion that understanding and practice are shaped by, and give shape to, the broader context in which they occur (Layder 1998). In other words, an adaptive approach acknowledges that a capacity to interact with the world – a habitus – is influenced by the space in which such interactions occur – a field.

Adaptive theory provides a way of articulating the ongoing and reflexive dialogue between the researcher and the research field, the researcher and research participants, and between participants and the shape of the research itself. This is made possible through what Layder terms ‘orienting concepts’ (1998). Orienting concepts provide the

temporary theoretical scaffolding that is required to help the researcher to bring some internal order to an emergent and contingent research process. Orienting concepts are handles for referring to existing knowledge brought to any research field by the researcher and “will be chosen from a rag-bag assortment of words, ideas, accounts, frameworks, phrases and so on, which represent established and recurrent ways of talking about the area in question” (Layder 1998, p.104). Before research in the field begins, these orienting concepts are actively sought in various literatures as an initial organising framework for managing research design. Coupled with concepts from non-academic literature and the researcher’s own experiences, orienting concepts provide “points of entry to the field” (Ezzy 2010). For example, a study seeking to understand the experiences of elite athletes might begin with the orienting concepts of ‘psychological pressure to perform’, ‘team identity’, ‘training regimes’ and ‘success’, drawn from both academic theories, and personal ideas about athletic practices.

Orienting concepts are effectively ‘ideas-in-view’ and necessarily come under constant review as the researcher moves through the research process. As the research develops, some orienting concepts are discarded and replaced by new concepts emerging from the participants and the research field. As Layder explains

The generation of adaptive theory operates at each and every moment of the research from the preparation and planning of data collection (including choice of methods and techniques, problems of access, and so on), through every phase of the actual collection and analysis of the data (1998, p.174).

For example after speaking to a number of athletes, themes like ‘high pressure’, ‘significant loss’, ‘competition amongst team mates’, and ‘personal satisfaction’ might emerge, while the relevance of ‘training regimes’ is absent. As new concepts emerge the researcher reconfigures the direction of the research, drawing again on personal experience, themes emerging from the fieldwork, and existing academic theories. By drawing on an adaptive approach to theory, not only is the interplay between researcher and research field acknowledged, but research participants directly influence the shape of research design. As Layder explains “concepts are not simply there in the literature waiting to be discovered, they are in a special sense ‘constructed’ by the person who is searching for them in that it is the researcher’s willingness and ability to spot them that actually induces their discovery!” (1998, p.107). Adaptive theory

facilitates an approach to research that is iterative and reflexive, generating data that is not limited or pre-determined by pre-imposed categories, yet helps to structure the evolving investigation.

Ongoing reflexivity is an important part of an adaptive approach to research. Orienting concepts help to document and reveal the implications of the habitus of the researcher and their interactions with the research field (both the research field as the geographical location of the research, and the research ‘field’ as understood by Bourdieu). As Kathy Charmaz argues “no analysis is neutral – despite research analysts’ claims of neutrality. We do not come to our studies uninitiated...” (2005, p.512). Layder’s orienting concepts are one way of formally acknowledging this lack of neutrality.

Comparison: the Sharehood and the Master Planned Estates (MPEs)

In the previous chapters I have said I want to explore sharing in Australian suburbs. I have reviewed literature on sharing and identified the predominant cultural narratives of Australian suburban life. In this chapter, having explained the suitability of qualitative inquiry as a method for seeking insight into what it *means* to share and *how* people share, I now outline the empirical scope of this study. I limit the focus of this study to two distinctly different types of suburban residents living in the city of Melbourne, Australia: those living in older, inner city suburbs and actively interested in sharing, and those living in new housing estates on the fringes of the city.

As in Chapter One, there is confusion about what types of urban settlement can be classed under the term ‘suburban’. As discussed earlier, a part of this is due to the Australian tendency to consider almost all residential areas of the city to be suburban (G. Davison 1994). This tendency is closely related to the physical peculiarity of Australian cities, which are among the least densely populated urban settlements in the world and which historically developed suburbs concurrently with, if not before, urban centres. I continue what Graeme Davison (1994) refers to as this ‘peculiar habit’ in part because the histories of these domestic abodes *are* suburban, in that they once were the fringes of the city and continue to carry some of that suburban identity today (A. Davison 2005). I also label these areas suburban because they are primarily constructed as low density detached dwellings and thus are suburban in design. While, as will be shown below, the inner suburbs in which Sharehood members live are gentrifying and

therefore display a tendency towards quite different demographics to those in the outer suburbs, this difference makes comparison of social norms and meanings of suburban life powerful for the differences and similarities that may be revealed.

In seeking to understand what it means to be suburban and the implications of this for social practices such as sharing, I ultimately aim to provide insight into what it means to share. By establishing this study as a comparison between two very different types of suburban environments, I hope to gain an understanding of how different environments are linked to different social identities and how, in turn, these identities may or may not be linked to different sharing practices. Not only is a comparison useful in itself, I also use this approach as a way to see more clearly my own ingrained assumptions about suburban life that developed as a result of my own suburban experiences. Thus this study was conducted as a comparison between two potentially different suburban cultures, located in two distinct geographical regions of the city of Melbourne drawing on qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews and written correspondence. The remainder of this chapter describes the two study populations and details the data collection and analysis methods.

The empirical focus of this study is on suburban life in Melbourne. Melbourne is the second biggest Australian city with a population of over four million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). While voted as the world's most liveable city in 2012, former deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe warns this title is at risk due to the increasingly sprawling nature of suburban development (Harrison 2012). The density of Melbourne is low by international standards, with an average of 14.9 people per hectare. By comparison cities of similar population and function such as Montreal and Toronto have averages of 33.8 and 41.5 people per hectare respectively (Department of Planning and Community Development 2002, p.60).

I chose two different study populations from Melbourne's suburban mass. The first consisted of people who had explicitly expressed interest in practices of neighbourly sharing through an online sharing network, the Sharehood. The second was chosen based on the question 'where do I find a group of people whom, based on the critical narratives of Australian life, are unlikely to share with their neighbours?' Members of each group had either a pre-existing social affiliation (participants in the same online sharing network), or shared a suburban location (residents of Master Planned Estates).

The Sharehood

The Sharehood was established in Melbourne, in 2009. It is a not-for-profit non-government organisation based on an online network for sharing resources (lawnmowers, books, washing machines, editing skills, excess produce, etc.) within local neighbourhoods. Theo Kitchener, founder of the group, explained that it all began when “I moved to a house that didn’t have a washing machine and I wanted to know my neighbours. I’m a real introvert so I decided to develop an elaborate internet scheme!” (Kitchener 2009). As a result Kitchener developed an online database (the Sharehood) for connecting local neighbours and their skills, time and material belongings. He invited his neighbours via a letterbox drop, explaining that the Sharehood is “all about sharing resources within your neighbourhood and help[ing] you to meet and make friends with people in your local area” (Sharehood 2012).

As the Sharehood grew in popularity and was utilised by other neighbours, more people became interested in the maintenance and development of the website and the idea. The Sharehood is now managed by the Sharehood Management Collective (the Collective) made up of a group of volunteers from different neighbourhoods. The Collective holds the broad vision of the network, thinks strategically, and guides the project on a broad scale. They also seek funding from government grants and individual philanthropists – indeed one generous Sharehood member donates a significant amount per year to pay the wages of a Sharehood employee. While donations from members are valued, membership of the network is in no way tied to financial or in kind contribution. The Sharehood employee, under the guidance of the Collective, also seeks funding and grants for further developing the project and promotes the Sharehood through various media outlets and festivals. The employee also engages with local (Victorian) municipal councils, maintains the website and sends out monthly emails to the network.

The Sharehood website provides guidance for those seeking to establish local sharing networks. People are encouraged to letterbox drop their neighbours about the Sharehood website and an invitation to participate. Members of the Sharehood can log on to the website (see Figure 1) and leave details about what they are willing to lend, and what they would like to borrow. The website reveals the names of people, and their

goods, (within the 400m³ radius) and enables participants to contact each other through the site. For those interested, the Sharehood offers a local currency (Samaras) by which neighbours can measure and keep track of exchanges. For example, if I lend a lawnmower, I can charge a neighbour 30 Samaras, which would be deducted from their online account and added to mine. I could then use those 30 Samaras to borrow someone else's wheelbarrow and rake. The Sharehood encourages not only the sharing of material belongings, but also sharing of experiences such as neighbourhood picnics and other community building activities. Such events are facilitated through the online 'community noticeboard'.

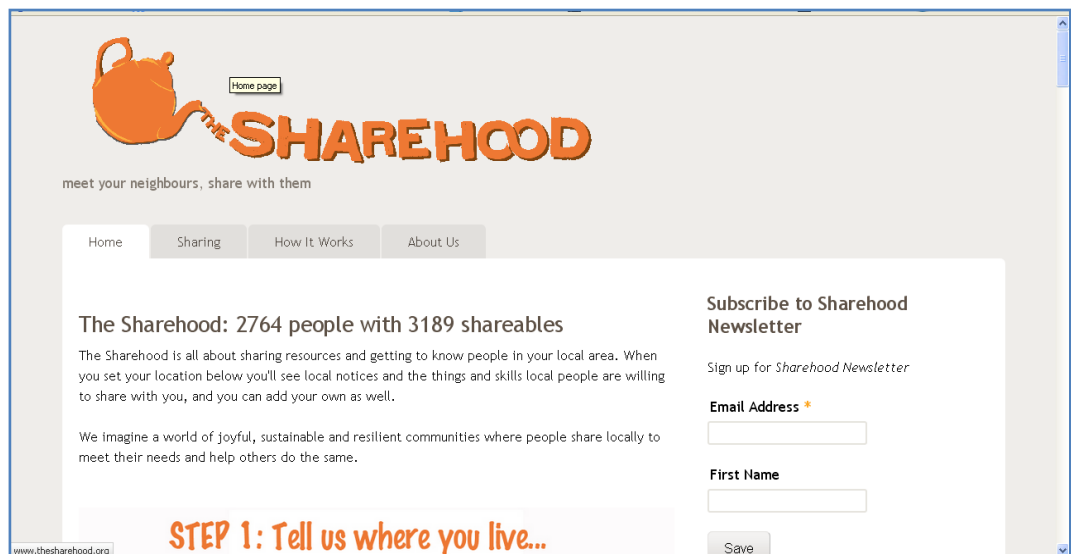


Figure 1: The Sharehood website (The Sharehood, 2013)

In June 2013, there were 2,764 Sharehood members (The Sharehood 2013). The Sharehood exists not only as a broad idea promoted and managed by the Collective, but as a collection of individual members loosely grouped according to geographical proximity. This means that for every single Sharehood member their configuration of the group is slightly different. For example, a member who signs up in Sydney will be part of a different local network, to a person who signs up from Melbourne. At a micro level this also means that two people at different ends of a street will have slightly different networks. While Sharehood membership is not necessarily limited to suburban environments, participants in this study were suburban and lived within a 15km radius of the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD).

³ Over the course of the research the Sharehood changed the access distance a number of times and members can now choose how big geographically they would like their Sharehood to be.

Participant recruitment

Adaptive theory informed the methods of participant recruitment. Sampling was purposive as I intentionally selected participants according to their expressed interest in practices of neighbourly sharing (May 2001). Members of the Sharehood were recruited to participate in my study through a quarterly email newsletter sent to members on behalf of the Collective (Appendix A). Initial recruitment used the concepts of 'wickedness and delight', early orienting concepts that were later displaced as ideas of 'sharing', 'community', 'taking' and 'self-sufficiency' became more important as a part of the adaptive process of inquiry. The invitation asked if anyone would be willing to talk about community, sharing and notions of wickedness and delight. This was because I was originally interested in how experiences of wickedness and delight might, or might not, be significant in people's decisions to change their behaviour. As such Sharehood members were asked to participate in a study 'Wicked Delight: Community engagement with change'. While broad interest in community and neighbourhood remained constant over time, the emphasis on wicked delight in the recruitment process is likely to have shaped the sample population. For example some people may have been concerned about an investigation into wickedness and thus may not have made contact to participate. Conversely, this focus may have attracted participants. Indeed one person admitted to wanting to take part in the research because she wanted to see where I was going with the terms 'wickedness' and 'delight'.

In total, five Sharehood members participated in this study (see Table 1). Of the participants, two were on the Management Collective, one regularly engaged with her network and the remaining two were in the process of establishing their own local Sharehoods. Three participants owned (or were purchasing) their own homes and all were university educated and Australian born. Table 1 summarises the Sharehood members who participated in this study; pseudonyms were used in order to protect their privacy. Given the low number of research participants from the Sharehood I also tried participant recruitment through the snowball technique (Ritchie et al. 2003). This meant I asked participants whether they could pass on the details of my study to other Sharehood members who might be interested. This approach proved unsuccessful.

All Sharehood participants, with the exception of one, were from the older, inner city suburbs of Melbourne such as Northcote, Carlton and Brunswick (within ~8km of the CBD (see Figure 2). In these suburbs Sharehood members generally have access to local shopping strips (in contrast to shopping malls) containing supermarkets, fruit shops,

clothing stores and a large number of small independent businesses and craft shops. Some of the suburbs also have access to the Merri Creek walking and cycling tracks and have excellent public transport. During the week and on the weekends, the main streets of these suburbs are bustling with life.

Demographically these core Sharehood suburbs exhibit high levels of tertiary education and low median ages (between 25-35) (Australian Bureau of Statistics n.d.). While these suburbs have been known for their student populations, they are becoming increasingly gentrified. For example, housing in Northcote is rapidly becoming more expensive both to purchase and to rent (Atkinson & Blandy 2005). It is also likely that residents in these suburbs will have relatively high levels of environmental awareness as is displayed by the high numbers of social and environmental activist groups in the area. These include Loophole, an Anarchist activist resource centre, and CERES (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies) located in East Brunswick. CERES provides a community education centre, organic café and workshop space, and hosts a weekly food swap where excess backyard produce can be shared and swapped with others. Similar food swap programs also exist in other nearby suburbs (Moreland Food Gardens Network n.d.).

Table 1: Research participants from the Sharehood

Name	Summary
Bea (re-interviewed)	An active Sharehood member. University educated, owns her own home, passionate about current social and environmental problems, considers herself left of centre (~50 years old).
Nick (re-interviewed)	On the Sharehood Management Collective. University educated, lives in a share house, passionate about social and environmental change and community, considers himself left of centre (~30 years old).
Penny	Just starting to promote the Sharehood in her neighbourhood. University educated, owns her own home, passionate about environmental issues and keen to be a role model for community-behaviour for her son (~40 years old).
James (re-interviewed)	On the Sharehood Management Collective. University educated, lives in a share house, passionate advocate of social and environmental justice, considers himself left of centre (~30 years old).
Kristin	Just starting a Sharehood. University educated, lives in her parent's house, interested in connecting with local community (~40 years old).

Introducing a comparison

The second suburban population I worked with consisted of residents from two Master Planned Estates (MPEs). It became obvious as I began to engage with participants from the Sharehood that to focus only on such a group would significantly limit the scope of my inquiry in two ways. First, it provided no way to engage with people who had not explicitly expressed an interest in sharing. Secondly, my own habitus matched closely not only in terms of values, but also geographically and experientially with those from the Sharehood. I realised that a contrasting cross-comparison was vital. Bourdieu explains that “the agent engaged in practice knows the world... without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he [sic] is caught up in it, bound up with it...” (2000, pp.142–3). Of course, it is possible to do very good research into one's own

cultural setting, and there are numerous examples of this in the anthropological literature (see for example, Chavez 2008; Kanuha 2000; Hockey 1993). Indeed having established a local sharing network myself, I was alive to the need to ask for particular details of phenomena that may not be present in general accounts of network function. Conducting a comparison between the two groupings, the Sharehood and the MPEs, is a useful way of revealing the assumed social norms and practices held by myself as the researcher and by the research participants.

The adaptive theory process helped me to recognise the risks of an investigation based entirely in a suburban field with which I am deeply familiar. The introduction of a comparative sample was a way to respond to this embodied bias and to gain insight into the perspectives of those not explicitly interested in neighbourly sharing. As Jasanoff writes,

The aim of comparison is to reveal, with critical detachment but epistemic clarity, what gives significance to another culture's distinctions and differences, not forgetting in the process to reflect on one's own. It is not the divine prerogative of producing universally valid principles of knowledge or governance that comparison should strive for. It is to make visible the normative implications of different forms of contemporary scientific and political life, and to show what is at stake, for knowing and reasoning human beings, in seeking to inhabit them (2005, p.291).

By comparing experiences across apparently different social and political contexts I sought to shed more light on my own understandings of sharing and to reveal elements of a habitus associated with practices of sharing in different fields of Australian suburban life. Given the apparent differences between Sharehood members, so keen to engage in neighbourly sharing, and the MPE residents, portrayed as being unlikely to share, it could be expected that two distinct types of suburban habitus may emerge reflecting quite different social norms related to sharing. As stated above, this comparison is expected to do two things: first, to reveal what it means to be suburban in two different suburban 'cultures', and second, to reveal different perspectives, experiences, expectations and attitudes towards sharing in Australian suburban life.

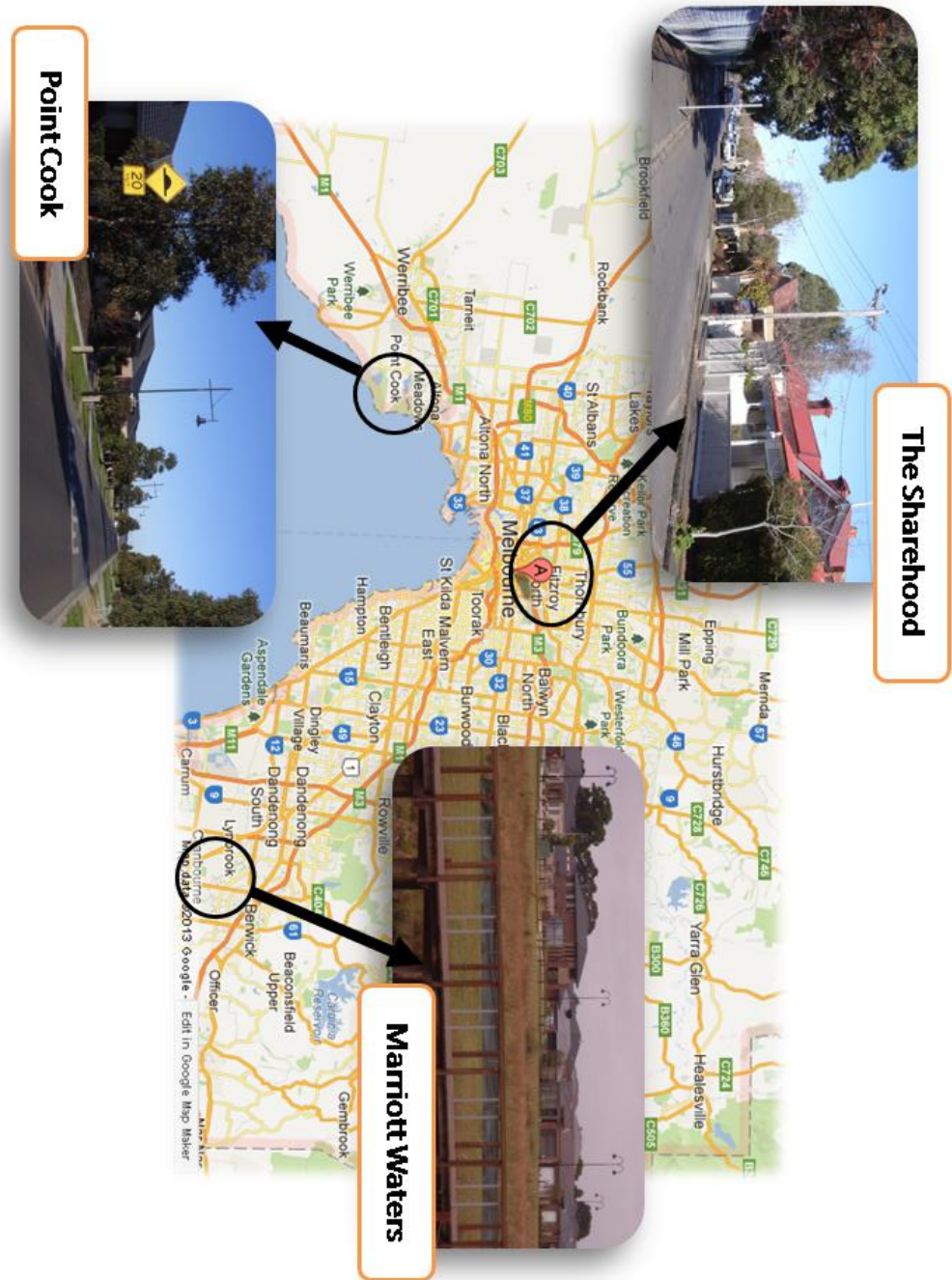


Figure 2: Study populations located in Melbourne, Australia

Master Planned Estates (MPEs)

In seeking a comparative sample I sought not only a group that is often defined by the broad narrative of suburban life as problematic, but one that was likely to be outside of my own experience. This second study population was drawn from residents of suburban Master Planned Estates (MPEs). In doing so, I chose MPEs that exist at the conventional end of McGuirk and Dowling's spectrum of master planning, as estates "where development complies with an overall vision of design and layout, often maintained through restrictive covenants on house and landscape design features" (2007, p.22). In Chapter Three, I explained why MPEs are considered unlikely sites of neighbourhood sharing as a part of their reputation (in some suburban narratives) as being 'the epitome of unsustainability' (Dowling & Power 2011). In summarising some of the literature on the topic McGuirk and Dowling (2007) argue that MPEs are viewed by many as "a contentious addition to the urban built and social landscape, they have engendered strong political debate. For some they are the precursors of the death of the public realm and the birth of an anaemic form of limited citizenship" (2007, p.22). Such critique suggests that those living in MPEs on the fringes of Melbourne are likely to exhibit a habitus attuned to a different field than those from the Sharehood, and indeed my own experiences.

In choosing a suburban population to compare to members of the Sharehood, I approached residents from two MPEs on opposite sides of Melbourne, one located to the south west in the Point Cook and the other to the south east in the Lyndhurst area (see Figure 2 above). Choosing two differently geographically located MPE populations was in part an attempt to cover both recent and more established MPEs, as well as being a practical decision to maximise recruitment (which will be discussed below on page 99). For the purposes of this inquiry, the two MPEs will be considered one case. While I describe them separately below, following their individual descriptions I subsequently refer to them together.

Point Cook

A colourful mosaic welcomes visitors to the Point Cook area, which on entry appears dominated by a large playground and a new shopping mall complex. The area is a mix of old and new development and the trees are relatively established, helping to soften the newness of the place. The shopping centre is bustling and in the middle of the week it can be found full of women, children and tradesmen having lunch. Utes, trucks, and

concrete mixers rush along the main road and the sounds of construction can be heard through the streets. Point Cook is obviously developing and expanding at a rapid rate.

Point Cook is located approximately 20km to the south west of the Melbourne CBD and is primarily made up of MPEs that have been built since 2000, although some developments from the 1980s and 1990s are now included in the Point Cook area (Figure 2). Towards the end of 2008, the Point Cook Town Centre was opened as a regional focal point for shopping and recreation. The facilities locally available to residents include two primary schools (a state school and a Catholic school), a high school, a local library and community centre, a large shopping complex which is almost exclusively full of chain stores. A smaller shopping arcade is also walking distance from the main shopping centre. Residents have access to over seven parks and two ovals, as well as a number of industrial stores selling furniture, air conditioning, plumbing supplies and home-wares. Several train stations are used by residents of Point Cook although these are usually a 15 minute bus ride away. Buses service the main roads; however these are not necessarily within walking distance for many residents.

Marriott Waters

Marriott Waters is a MPE approximately 25km south east of the Melbourne CBD (see Figure 2). It is located in the Cranbourne/Lyndhurst area and is settled between a growing number of new estates and a dwindling array of paddocks and grasslands. Unlike Point Cook, Marriott Waters is a single estate and relatively isolated. Residents have access to a petrol station and three fast food outlets located on the edge of the estate. The centrepiece of Marriott Waters is a recently constructed wetland surrounded by paved walking paths, a playground, and a school which opened in 2011. Supermarkets and a small shopping mall are approximately 15 minutes drive away. The developers of Marriott Waters have also promised a residents club containing a gym and restaurants, as well as a shopping centre with a major supermarket. Although promised for the future, no buses currently service the estate and the closest train station is at least 30 minutes walk along the dusty (or muddy) edges of a major country road. Some parking is provided at the train station and this is well utilised, although the need to drive to public transport nodes contributes substantially to morning and evening traffic congestion.

Participant recruitment

Participants were recruited from MPEs using a number of random sampling techniques – that is, people within the sampling frame (residents of the two outer suburban MPEs) all had an equal chance at being a part of the research (May 2001). In contrast to the Sharehood recruitment letter, which mentioned the terms ‘wickedness and delight’, participants from the MPEs were told “in conducting this study on people’s experiences of community I am especially interested in your life and the story that has brought you to [suburb name]”. Initially residents were approached through a letterbox drop. At both Point Cook and Marriott Waters 300 leaflets were distributed to letterboxes (a copy of this can be found in Appendix B). Five responses were received (a response rate of less than 1%), highlighting the difficulty of engaging with this particular population on the topic of sharing. An invitation was also placed in the local developer’s newsletter distributed in one of the estates (see Appendix C) and in the school newsletter of a local Catholic school. Neither of these methods elicited any responses.

As a result of the difficulty recruiting participants from specific MPEs, I sought residents from suburbs in the Point Cook area, adjacent to the MPE, through the placement of advertisements on two community noticeboards: one in a prominent coffee shop on the main street, and the other on a community noticeboard hidden down a corridor in the community centre (see Appendix D). This resulted in two more participants from the Point Cook region (one from the originally letter-boxed new estate and another from an older residential development).

With this initial sample of eight participants I then used the snowball technique to recruit additional participants by asking them to recommend participating in the study to their neighbours. While Ritchie et al. (2003) point out the dangers of this for compromising the diversity of the sample, such problems can be overcome if care is taken and provide a useful way of accessing an elusive population (May 2001). In the case of this inquiry, participants were asked whether they would be willing to pass on my details to others within their street or suburb. Such an approach yielded two new research participants. One was a close friend of an initial participant who lived nearby the Marriott Waters estate, and the other was the husband of an existing participant. Rather than compromising the diversity of sample, these proved invaluable participants as they provided additional perspectives of the same suburban contexts not encompassed by the original sample.

Ten participants from the MPEs were long term residents of outer suburbs, while one woman had recently moved much closer to the city. Seven participants owned (or were purchasing) their own homes, while four lived in rental properties. Nine participants were university educated and two were small business owners. Within the group there was a great diversity of personalities, political sympathies and national backgrounds (Australian, Russian, New Zealander and South African). As with the Sharehood, there was a noticeable absence of Asian and African nationalities. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (n.d.) suggest my samples were not representative of the multiculturalism in both areas (over 30% non-Australian born in both the MPE areas and the inner city Sharehood areas). Anecdotally research participants also acknowledged the high diversity of nationalities in the study MPEs – especially Indian and Chinese. Table 2 summarises the MPE residents who participated in this study; pseudonyms were used in order to protect their privacy.

Table 2: Research participants from MPEs

Name (pseudonym)	Summary
Liz	University educated, lives in a rental share house (~30 years old).
Mel	University educated, owns own home and lives with her family, just outside of an MPE (~40 years old)
Lauren	University educated, lives in a rented family home (~40 years old)
Luke	University educated, lives in rented family home, father of young children (~50 years old)
Mike	University educated, owns own home, father of young children (~40 years old)
Kylie	University educated, owns own home, mother of young children (~40 years old)
Scott	Small business owner, owns own home which he shares with his wife (~40 years old)
Maria	University educated, owns own home, mother of young children (~30 years old)
Tony	Small business owner, owns own home, father of young children (~30 years old)
Nancy	University educated, lives in a rented family home that she shares with her partner and young children (~30 years old)
Alice	University educated, owns own home which she shares with partner and young children (~30 years old)

Sample limitations

Given the difficulty I faced in participant recruitment, sample sizes from both the Sharehood and MPE populations are relatively small. While this may limit the spectrum of suburban experiences available for exploration, it does not necessarily reduce the

potential to provide insight into suburban experiences of sharing. Crouch and McKenzie argue that, in the context of qualitative research, “a small number of cases (less than 20, say) will facilitate the researcher’s close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings” (2006, p.483). The methods detailed below emphasise attempts at developing strong and in-depth relationships in order to understand in some detail the nuances of suburban practice.

Methods

In conducting a qualitative inquiry into sharing, I relied on methods which would draw out perspectives on social practice as experienced and understood by individuals situated within their social and cultural fields. This kind of approach was vital to enable me to answer the questions ‘what does it mean to live suburban lives in Australia?’ ‘How is the practice of sharing shaped by what it means to live an Australian suburban life?’ and ‘what are the most significant social norms of Australian suburban life that influence everyday sharing practices?’ I used discursive methods to understand attitudes, experiences, assumptions and expectations of suburban life in order to gain insight into the social norms shaping practice. This data enabled insight into how conscious acts of neighbourly sharing are, or are not, practised within particular suburban contexts and how they might implicitly be shaped by unspoken social norms. To do this I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and engaged a number of participants in ongoing written correspondence, as well as maintaining a reflective research journal.

Data collection

I began the fieldwork for this study by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with Sharehood members. As a result of the adaptive approach to research design, I then sought research participants from the MPEs. At the same time, I began written correspondence (an ongoing exchange of letters – explained below) with Sharehood participants. Interviews and letters with the Sharehood shaped interviews and eventually written correspondence with MPE residents. Over time, interviews with MPE residents shaped written correspondence with the Sharehood and correspondence from both groups influenced each other, as explained in Figure 3. In the following sections I outline the semi-structured interview process and the written correspondence method.

The Adaptive Research Process

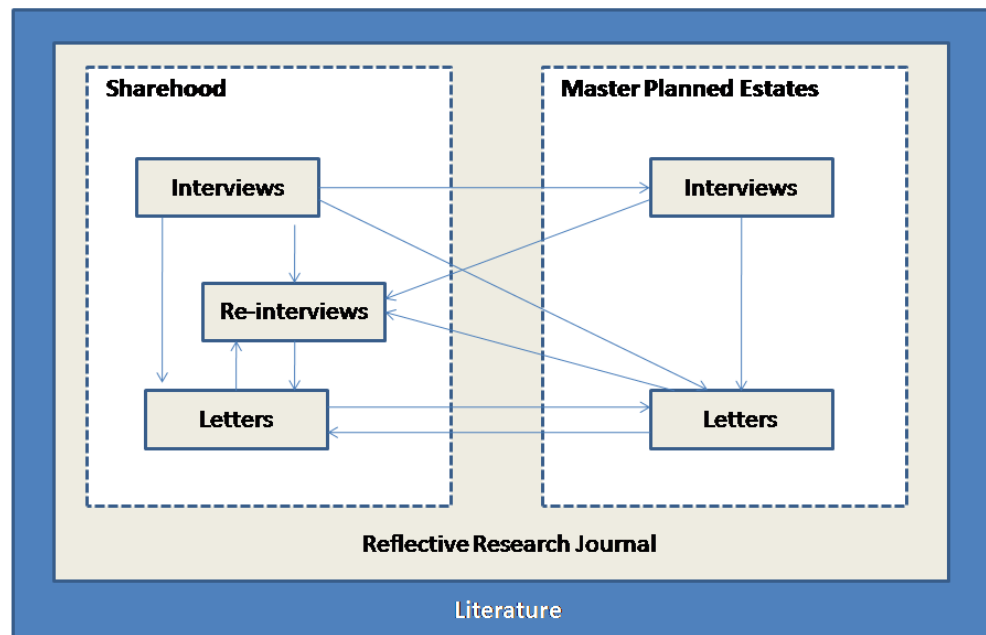



Figure 3: Influence diagram of research methods

Adaptive development of orienting concepts

As indicated earlier, research design and analysis was guided by orienting concepts that changed over time. Table 3 shows the development of orienting concepts, as a result of the interplay between literature and empirical evidence, over the course of the inquiry. Orienting concepts prior to interviews with the Sharehood included 'wickedness' and 'delight', terms drawn from personal empirical experience and mostly absent from any theoretical literature. As can be seen in Table 3, these terms were dropped for the interviews with MPEs, although were temporarily replaced by the language of 'surprise' and 'unexpected behaviour'. These terms were also eventually dropped, an indication that they had weak explanatory power in analysis of the experiences of the suburban residents I spoke with. By contrast, the concepts of 'taking', 'self-sufficiency' and 'giving' were introduced, as were 'power', 'good citizenship' and 'leadership'. While emerging from the empirical data, such concepts are also theorised in existing literature which in turn informed the procedure of the empirical enquiry. With the introduction of each new orienting concept, I was able to consider understandings of sharing from new angles. The strength of some orienting concepts remained and their presence will be apparent in the following discussion chapters.

Table 3: Orienting concepts over time

Orienting concepts prior to interviews with Sharehood	Orienting concepts prior to interviews with MPEs	Orienting concepts during written correspondence with Sharehood and MPEs
Wickedness	X	X
Delight	X	X
Sharehood	Sharing	Sharehood/Sharing
Rules	Rules	Rules*
Social norms	Social norms	Social norms*
Social change	Social change	Social change
Community	Community	Community
Neighbours	Neighbours	Neighbours
	Unusual behaviour	X
	Surprise	X
	Taking	Taking*
	Self-sufficiency	Self-sufficiency*
	Habitus	Habitus
		Giving*
		Power
		Good citizenship*
		Leadership
		Private retreat*
Time 		
*emerged as the most significant concepts that shape the following discussion		

Qualitative semi-structured interviews

The use of the semi-structured interview assumes that “meaningful properties of social reality” can be understood through personal dialogue (Mason 2007, p.63). Semi-structured interviews differ from structured interviews in that while basic content is introduced by the researcher, each interview takes its own course and themes (orienting concepts) may appear and/or new ones emerge (Legard et al. 2003, p.141). The semi-

structured interview allows space for research participants to influence the flow of conversation and enables new orienting concepts to emerge.

In conducting semi-structured interviews I sought a method that foregrounded the value of people's perceptions, experiences and relationships and as such would enable me to construct some understanding as to the fields of play and the habitus that shape everyday practices of sharing. The aim of the interviews was to gain insight not only into the attitudes of research participants towards sharing, but to obtain a feel for the implied social rules that shaped how social interactions within the suburban context unfolded and the implications of this for social practices of sharing; both important as articulated as part of the research questions posed in Chapter one. The semi-structured interviews were conducted as a dialogue, or exchange, between myself and participants which I guided, at least initially (Mason 2007; Legard et al. 2003, p.138). As the interview progressed the conversation became less structured as research participants introduced new ideas and language; new 'orienting concepts' likely to provide insight into suburban life and practices of sharing.

Over the course of this inquiry I conducted three rounds of semi-structured interviews. The first involved five members of the Sharehood (July – August 2010), the second eleven members of the MPEs (December 2010 and July 2011), and the third round was secondary interviews with three Sharehood members (July 2011). Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and were conducted following an indicative interview schedule (see Appendix E) which drew on initial orienting concepts as shown above (Table 3) and provided a set of guidelines and prompts. Interviews were primarily framed around two key themes established to gain insight into the research questions on suburban experience and the relationship between social norms and practices of sharing; the experiences of participants within their suburban neighbourhoods, and their experiences of sharing. Each interview began with a brief introduction to the research, and an assurance regarding the ethics protocols in place (all interviews conducted with approval from the University of Tasmania's Human Ethics Committee). Introductions to the research were framed around my interest in participants' experience of suburban life. However, as explained below, given the iterative development of the research themes in this inquiry, interviews with members of the Sharehood differed in their initial focus from those with residents of MPEs.

Each interview began with specific questions, such as ‘who do you live with?’, ‘how long have you lived in your current neighbourhood?’ and ‘where did you previously live?’ These descriptive questions provided an easy point of access into the conversation which enabled both the research participant and myself to take stock of each other and become comfortable in our discussion. Focusing early questioning on simple description, rather than on complex description or interpretation, also helped to reassure those participants who were concerned about their ability to answer research questions. Following Mason, I then sought to “ensure that relevant contexts [were] brought into focus so that situated knowledge [could] be produced” (2007, p.63). Thus after the ‘warm up’ I turned to questions that were likely to elicit more interpretive responses such as ‘what do you like/dislike about where you live?’, ‘can you describe the people in your neighbourhood?’, ‘what kind of relationship do you have with your neighbours?’ and ‘how do you feel about sharing with your neighbours?’ These questions were designed to elicit information about the social norms and practices of daily suburban life, both in general and as they explicitly related to acts of sharing.

Interviewing (and reinterviewing)

Five members of the Sharehood were interviewed in July 2010. Participants chose the location of the interviews, a mix of local cafes and private homes. Three participants from the Sharehood were reinterviewed during 2011, subsequent to interviews with participants from MPEs. Following Layder’s adaptive theory, this second round of interviews was aimed at building on the orienting concepts that emerged from conversations both with the Sharehood initially and then with the MPE participants (see Table 3). Reinterviews were also a way of maintaining cohesiveness across the project as a whole, ensuring that the concepts developed from the initial Sharehood interviews and introduced into the MPEs were fed back to the Sharehood (see Figure 3: Influence diagram of research methods). The second interview allowed for clarification, and the exploration of issues relating to orienting concepts that emerged during interviews with MPEs.

Like those from the Sharehood, MPE participants chose to meet me either in local cafes or at their homes (See Appendix F for interview schedule). Three of the interviews conducted in private homes also involved the partners of original participants who contributed with their own reflections, observations and stories. All partners gave informed consent to participate in the study. The presence of these people is recognised in Table 2 above.

Audio recordings of all of the interviews were collected (with participant permission) and later transcribed. After each interview I also wrote down my impressions of the meeting, taking note of body language to ensure that on later consideration of the recordings I could interpret them in context. I also undertook to transcribe the audio files myself in order to ensure that the tone of voice was considered in later analysis.

Limitations of the semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview process elicited richly textured accounts of personal experience and interpretation of suburban life and neighbourhood practices of sharing. Such richness was vital to my desire to learn not just what kind of sharing occurred, but what it meant when situated within particular contexts. A key element of the adaptive theory process is ongoing reflection on the design and intent of research methods. As a part of such reflection it became apparent that interviews were limited as a method for revealing some of the ‘invisible gridlines’ of everyday practice –the nuances of suburban habitus. The use of semi-structured interviews provided a way to test out orienting concepts and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the attitudes towards and understandings of sharing in the suburban context. The use of adaptive theory, as discussed above, helped to provide a framework for the ‘layering up’ of understanding and the interview process was vital for this. Yet what became clear as the interviews progressed was the need to elicit understanding about non-events.

In investigating sharing, in which practices of giving and receiving are expected to occur, it was difficult to understand the processes individuals went through in deciding not to ask a neighbour to share. While it is possible to question a participant about why they did not ask to share, it is harder to elicit a reflective response on an action which did not occur simply because it was outside of assumed normal behaviour when no explicit decision occurred. While interviews yielded interesting insights, they failed to reveal the more subtle influence on behaviour, or any insights into the suburban habitus. It was important for me to understand the cultural capital shaping decisions and practices given my stated beliefs above about the inseparable nature of subjective and objective phenomena; I needed a way to be witness to the complex synthesis of rationalities shaping social norms of sharing in suburban context.

In considering the need to elicit non-events, Richard Thompson (1977) draws on his experience in a local council. He explains that the importance of non-events is often only made clear because “*occasional references* alone point to what is missing” (1977, p.136

emphasis added). Thompson suggests that unknown unknowns are only revealed through chance, only because a reference is made in passing. In order to increase the number of opportunities for 'occasional references to what is missing', and therefore clues about non-events and non-practice, I drew on the written correspondence method. This method enabled an exploration of people's reflections on neighbourly practices of sharing, in the hope that such reflections would incidentally reveal some of the hidden assumptions of practice.

Written correspondence

While participant observation and ethnographic methods hold potential for this type of inquiry, I chose to rely heavily on the written correspondence method. The written correspondence method aims to elicit the views, experiences and perspectives of research participants through an ongoing exchange of letters (Rautio 2009; Jennifer Harris 2002). While the use of written correspondence to verify or clarify findings fairly is common in qualitative research (Jennifer Harris 2002), there exists in the literature very little reference to the method as a primary data source (outside of analysis of historical letters and records). As Jennifer Harris notes, Denzin and Lincoln in their 462 pages on data collection and analysis, accord less than one page to letters as primary data (Jennifer Harris 2002, p.2). In the last ten years there have been two key publications on written correspondence in qualitative research and I drew heavily on both these papers (Jennifer Harris 2002; Rautio 2009), although Clandinin and Connelly (1998) also make reference to the potential of written correspondence.

The written correspondence method involves a regular exchange of written letters between the researcher and individual participants over an extended period of time. As Pauliina Rautio (2009) explains, the temporal nature of letter writing means that ideas are given time to unfold and participants can engage with ideas slowly and reflectively. Indeed, given time the same experiences can be explored from a number of different angles and moods. Rautio, whose study was focussed on everyday ideas about beauty, writes,

Such a request [to engage in written correspondence], I soon realised, demanded considerable engagement, reflection and quite simply time from the participant. To be able to discern what is beautiful in your everyday life, you need to evaluate your daily life in light of the past, the present, and your hopes for the future (Rautio 2009, p.19).

In part because of the time invested by both researcher and participant, the written correspondence method allows for ongoing and reflexive dialogue to develop in a way that is much harder to establish even in a longer semi-structured interview. Not only that, but correspondents were able to consider their responses over time, and in their own time, and to explain experiences in detail without reaction from me. Rather than seeking approval in my body language, my absence both physically and temporally allowed the participant considered control over their responses. That many participants told me stories only peripherally related to conceptualisations and practices of sharing, helped to develop understandings of suburban field and habitus more generally.

Written correspondences helps to create what Thompson (1977) referred to as 'occasional references', giving insights into values expectations and practices more generally. In applying this method I sought a way to gain insight into concepts and practices of sharing, and to understand more fully the field (as revealed through both intentional and occasional references) in which the norms of social practice were developed and maintained.

All research participants involved in semi-structured interviews were invited to partake in written correspondence. I drew on written correspondence as a method in order to develop an ongoing dialogue in which research participants and I could reflect on the main orienting concepts emerging from interviews and letters. For example, as the orienting concept of 'power' emerged, I was able to explicitly ask participants to reflect on power in relation to questions of sharing, suburban life and neighbourly relations. This dialogue was a useful way of gaining a more detailed picture of the daily neighbourhood interactions between suburban residents – by patching together the various elements of participant's suburban lives I was able to build a fuller understanding over time.

Invitations to participate in written correspondence were issued either at the end of the interview or via email some days later. I told prospective correspondents how interesting I had found our conversation and that I was interested in a deeper understanding of how their suburbs and neighbourhoods functioned. Letters would be

exchanged between myself and participants approximately once each month⁴ and would initially contain direct questions and reflections on suburban life. Participants were also invited to ask me about my suburban experience, my research, or anything else that they may have deemed relevant. Participants were assured that letters would be confidential and that they could pull out of the process at any time without providing an explanation (see Appendix G for consent form).

Written correspondence began with two participants from the Sharehood in October 2010. In February 2011, five MPE residents joined in the process (see Table 4). Although each letter was different, initial letters included a paragraph which ran something like

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity for a letter exchange via snail mail as I think it will provide a nice place for reflection. This first letter will seem a little formal but I hope it ends up being a personal, critical and reflective process. I imagine that the nature of these letters will evolve, but I'd really like to use them as a space to reflect on everyday experiences of neighbourhood. What interactions have you had recently with people in your local area?

I was careful to emphasise the personal, critical and reflective nature of the process and that I was happy for the exchange to evolve. As discussed in Chapter One, I used the concept of neighbourhood rather than suburb as a way of indicating I was interested in local suburban life, not just the suburb as marked on a map. I often included anecdotes of my own suburban experiences to elicit responses that were less targeted. For example after writing about an interaction with a neighbour I would often finish with the question, 'I wonder why?' In setting up the process I requested that each participant used the postal service rather than email and that if possible they handwrite letters rather than typing. Every letter I sent included a stamped return addressed envelope.

Table 4 below shows which participants were involved and how many letters were exchanged with each person. In establishing the correspondence method I made a conscious decision to request that people handwrite (or at the very least type and then post) their letters rather than using email. While at the time I was unable to articulate the reason for posted letters over email, it later became apparent that in this study

⁴I followed Rautio's (2009) guidance here, deciding that a month seemed to be a length of time short enough for letters to be remembered, but not so frequent as to become hugely burdensome for myself or participants.

posted letters yielded richer results. Both Mike and Nancy asked to participate via email and, not wanting to exclude any participant, I agreed to this. The difference in content between those posting letters and those using email was stark (examples of types of exchange can be found in Appendix H). Email responses tended to be shorter and treat the queries contained within my letters more like survey questions rather than like ongoing dialogue. For example while an email correspondent might take several sentences to answer a question such as ‘how would you feel if a stranger in a café introduced themselves’, there was no flow to the letter and it was not answered in any broader context. By comparison, those who sent letters through the postal system (even if they typed them and then printed them out) tended to write more freely and more personally. Such letters provided more opportunities for those ‘occasional references that point to what is missing’. Realising the difference in email versus postal exchange I ultimately decided against email correspondence, although I have included the few email exchanges a part of this study. Given the small sample size of email correspondence, it is possible that such a method may work in a future study.

Table 4: Research participants in written correspondence

Participant	Period of exchange	Number of letters received
Bea (Sharehood)	August 2010 – December 2012	12
Nick (Sharehood)	August 2010 – April 2012	9
Liz (MPE)	March 2011 – January 2012	5
Lauren (MPE)	August 2011 – March 2012	5
Alice (MPE)	July 2011 – January 2012	2
Mike (MPE) – email	February 2011 – April 2011	2
Nancy (MPE) – email	February 2011 – April 2011	2

As my relationship with each corresponding participant developed, variation between the content of my letters to different correspondents increased, and the style of correspondence also changed. For example some participants invited more of a shared exploration of ideas, while others preferred to stick more to experiences they were

confident about (see also Appendix H – same as above). The letter writing process reflected a highly adaptive approach. Each letter I wrote developed in response to all letters I had received, just as the participants' letters responded to my mine, and as such the focus and nature of exchanges changed over time as orienting concepts were extended or dropped. For example, questions and reflections on 'surprise' in the suburbs yielded very little response and as such 'surprise' was dropped as potential orienting concept. In order to keep track of the concepts and ideas I wanted to raise, and those I had already covered, I maintained my research journal as part of good fieldwork practice. This also meant that comparison between responses was possible to a certain degree. Paragraphs from letters were also shared anonymously between participants (with their permission). This enabled correspondents themselves to compare perspectives and reflect on their own experiences in light of others'.

An advantage of the written correspondence method is the distance (physically and temporally) between the researcher and the participant. As a result, participants were perhaps more willing to share intimate and detailed stories of their lives giving insight into attitudes and lived social norms relevant to the suburban field and sharing practices. Because accounts of individual suburban lives unfolded over months and I was able to ask for details and seek clarification of letter content in later correspondence. Correspondents were also able to reflect on issues (as introduced by me) as they became relevant in their daily lives and letters often contained reflections on previous topics. That some correspondents often re-told experiences over the course of the correspondence enabling me to understand in more detail the nuances of particular practices, as they were told in a number of different ways by the same participant.

Those who participated in the letter exchange all did so because they were committed to the process of reflection. Indeed two participants saw written correspondence as a way of holding themselves accountable to their suburban experiences by consciously reflecting on their daily lives. As a result, rather than being limited to short answers, correspondents would often explain in detail stories of their lives, expectations and experiences.

Ethical Considerations of the Written Correspondence Method

In conducting an inquiry based on written correspondence there are some issues that need to be considered. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) note that the written

correspondence has a tendency to create a kind of equality between researcher and participant. They argue that

in personal experience research, letters, as a research method, may be used among participants, among research collaborators, or among researchers and participants. In each case one of their merits is the equality established, the give and take of conversation (1998, p.168).

This point about equality between researcher and participant proved to be one of the intriguing elements of my use of this method and required continual reflection and evaluation of how I engaged with participants. In particular I ran the risk that any of the correspondents (including myself as the researcher) might reveal more about themselves than they meant to.

The practice of letter writing can be quite intimate and almost like a personal diary and, unlike an interview, leaves a much more material trace. As a researcher, it was often difficult to determine how to respond when participants revealed personal episodes of depression or divorce. In responding to this difficulty I turned to the work of Harris (2002) who, in using the correspondence method, worked with women involved in self-harm practices. Harris often received letters with graphic descriptions of abuse and had to consider very carefully her correspondence. She writes that “the most difficult aspect of the study involved working out how to respond to letters” (Jennifer Harris 2002, p.4). Harris explained that her approach was to acknowledge what they had written without offering any kind of advice or counselling. She explained the importance of demonstrating that “the correspondent’s statement had been heard, had registered and had an effect” (Jennifer Harris 2002, p.4). I took a similar approach in responding to such personal revelations by participants in my study. I also tried to ensure that I made clear boundaries by reminding people I was conducting a research project (this was primarily done by providing a university address rather than my personal address).

Revealing positionality: research journal

Reflective research journaling provides a conscious way of recording and reflecting on both literature and engagement with participants. This is a particularly useful method to employ when drawing on an adaptive approach to research because, as Gerstl-Pepin and Partizio argue:

Each interaction with data, beginning with the collection, results in some form of analysis by the researcher. These present opportunities to absorb, react to, question, agree with, or make connections with what the researcher knows. Each of these opportunities can lead to greater awareness that the mind is multifaceted and requires external documentation. Keeping track of this growing awareness is challenging (2009, p.303).

A research journal is a way of keeping track of these evolving thoughts and experiences so that they can be revisited and considered at a later date, enabling orienting concepts to be added or discarded as necessary. Research journals, often referred to as ‘field notes’ in anthropological literature, are “writings produced in or in close proximity to ‘the field’. Proximity means that field notes are written more or less *contemporaneously* with events, experiences and interactions they describe and recount” (Emerson et al. 2001, p.535). In my case I wrote in my journal after reading particularly interesting or unusual papers that prompted analysis in terms of my research questions, experiencing something that triggered a thought about my research, after each semi-structured interview, after receiving each letter, and during or after each visit to my field sites. My journal was a space for personal reflections and observations to mix with reflections and observations of others. It was also a place for exploring my own bias and research blind spots. As Hubbs and Brand argue “reflective journaling can provide ways to illuminate automatic thinking and habits of mind, and can lead [people] through a transformative process” (2005, p.63). This was something that I experienced first-hand.

It was through the practice of journaling, and a return to these journals, that I realised how differently I had initially treated the Sharehood and MPE participants. Interviews with Sharehood members were conducted in locations with which I was familiar. In one of my research journals, in 2011, I wrote:

I also caught myself making another research blunder. I was writing my methodology/methods chapter and I realised that my eyes were open when I visited the MPEs and closed for the Sharehood suburbs. Even though I’m not familiar with Melbourne’s inner suburbs I still took a lot less care in my examination of the physical context (Research Journal July 2011).

Although not directly familiar with many of the Sharehood suburbs, they were places that I assumed to be similar to those in which I had lived. Superficially at least, I

understood the norms involved with meeting with Sharehood participants and felt comfortable within these suburban fields. In short, they were places in which I was able to act with eloquence because of the match between suburban field and my habitus. Because of this I failed to journal about the resources available, the physical shabbiness of many of the places and I glossed over some of what I saw as the less attractive elements such as abandoned buildings, or vandalised bus stops.

In contrast, when I found myself in MPEs, places with which I was unfamiliar, I was careful to note down all sorts of mundane details: the types of letterboxes, the cracks in the public bridges, how people dressed and my own discomfort and uncertainty about social protocols (including, for example, what I should wear). In essence, because I lacked, or thought I lacked, a habitus suited to the field of the MPEs, I treated the site with a much more critical eye and in doing so was attuned to inquire into the social norms shaping sharing experiences. This bias was only revealed to me as I reconsidered my journals and reflected on an email I had written about my experiences in Melbourne (see Appendix I). As a result, I returned to the Sharehood field sites with a more critical and self-reflexive eye, resulting in a more robust analysis. As an important source of data, I draw on my research journals in the following analysis chapters.

Analysis

Interpretive and reflexive analysis

Analysis of semi-structured interviews, written correspondence and my reflective journals was based on the assumption that as forms of data they are representations of values, actions and experiences of individuals (Mason 2007). Mason (2007) suggests that there are three main ways to 'read' qualitative data; literally, interpretively and reflexively. A literal reading focuses on the form, structure and explicit content of the data and assumes that a purely objective description of sharing is possible. For example, a literal reading of my data would be to take at face value, as truth, the words people say whilst disregarding the greater context of their lives and the research exchange. To solely rely on such analysis would be problematic for an investigation seeking to understand the role of social and environmental context, the fields of play, in shaping daily social practices of sharing.

By contrast, an interpretive reading of data assumes an interest in how participants interpret and make sense of various phenomena (Mason 2007; Spencer et al. 2003). For example a participant might explain that they did not want to lend a neighbour their lawnmower. Read literally, I could tally up the number of other participants who felt the same and conclude that half of the research population did not lend garden tools. On the other hand, I could look more deeply into the response and in considering it in the context of body language, tone of voice, and other comments the participant had made, I may *interpret* unwillingness to lend the lawnmower as an issue of trust. Or as another example, rather than assuming that a participant saying ‘Yeah I share all the time’ can be read literally, I could consider what this might mean in the context of the participants’ experiences. What does the participant mean by sharing? What do they mean by ‘all the time’ and how can I know or understand this without explicit clarification? An interpretive approach therefore involves making connections and identifying themes within the data set. An interpretive approach does not require a linear interpretation of the data; rather it allows the whole context to be considered. Indeed an interpretive approach enables the application of analytical concepts, such as habitus, field and capital, to interrogate the use of language by participants.

Because analysis was ongoing, it was not only how data was ‘read’ that was interpretive, but how it was co-constructed as an ongoing dialogue between myself as researcher and my research participants. In particular this shared conversation was a key element of the written correspondence method. For example, over time I was able to question interpretations of experiences and to develop a broader contextual understanding of participant responses. At the same time, participants were interpreting my questions and my comments and thus an ongoing and interpretive dialogue was developed and maintained.

Coding methods

The process of coding, according to Ezzy is a way of “identifying the themes and concepts that are in the data” (2002, p.86); it is a process for finding out just what the data is about. In this thesis, data was grouped into themes based on theoretical and emergent concepts with the key research questions in mind. In adaptive theory, coding is generally thematic, as the various dominant themes emerge in the data to form orienting concepts. These are shown in Appendix J and in Table 3 on page 104. In this

inquiry coding was guided by three different coding protocols; open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Open coding

Open coding is a process by which the researcher sorts for meaning, feelings and actions (Ezzy 2002). Initial open coding contains little or no selective differentiation across the data. For example in the initial open coding process I did not intentionally seek themes or sort according to pre-identified categories (see also Appendix J) (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Following Layder's (1998) adaptive theory, open coding was done on existing theoretical concepts, orienting concepts from the research (developed throughout the data collection process), and thematic codes emerging from the empirical data. Orienting concepts themselves initially served as temporary codes for analysis (Layder 1998) although this is not to say that a structure was imposed on the data. Rather, the data itself was used to help create order throughout the process. As explained above on page 104, such orienting concepts changed over time, helping to shape the course of the research project itself (see Table 3).

Axial coding

Axial coding refers to the development of initial 'first order' codes and integrating emergent themes around central categories. It is a practice that involves making links between the various themes or orienting concepts developed through open coding (Ezzy 2002, p.92). For example, one participant might make reference to feeling socially awkward about asking a neighbour for something and thus I would code this 'socially awkward'. Another participant might say that they disliked talking to their neighbours when they got home from work, thus I would categorise this as 'dislike of conversation'. Eventually I grouped such codes under the broader banner of 'discomfort' and used this code to seek out other instances in the data of where discomfort was displayed. This process was conducted manually using filing cards (see Figure 4: Example of manual coding process) in place of a computer program such as NViVO which was not suited to the analysis of written correspondence. Although all correspondence was scanned and digitally stored, NViVO was unable to handle images in any sophisticated way and could only deal with data in pdf form in limited ways.

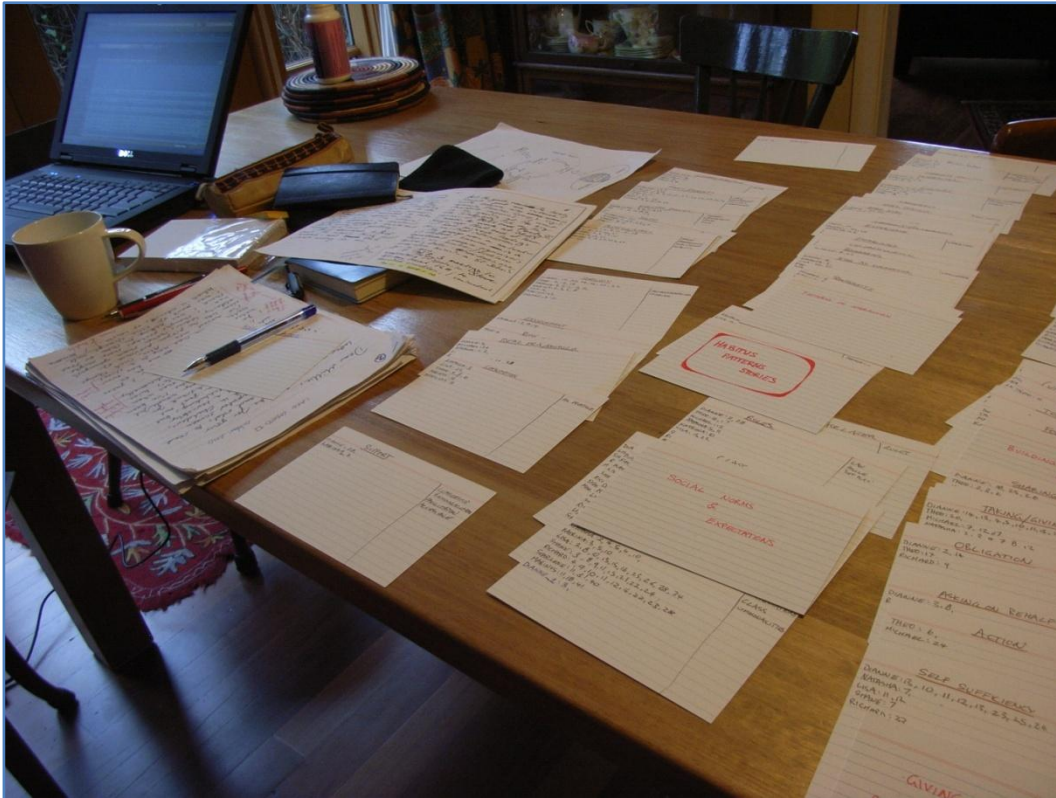


Figure 4: Example of manual coding process

Having developed some broader second order codes, such as discomfort, I then sought to understand how each of these related to each other and whether they were similarly present in both the Sharehood and MPE groups (see Figure 5). As my understanding of these broader themes changed, the axial codes also changed and in some cases became coded yet again under broader or narrower headings.

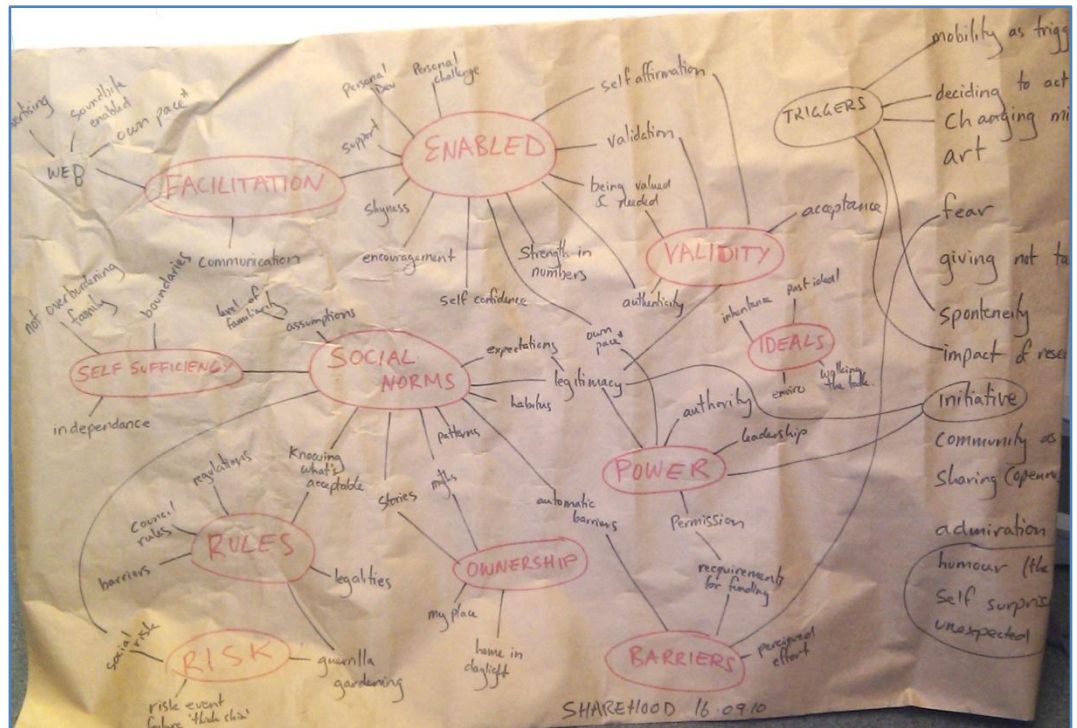


Figure 5: Example of axial coding

Selective coding

As part of data analysis, alongside the open and axial coding, I also coded selectively, seeking out specific terms and themes (Ezzy 2002). In doing this I actively sought out references to experiences of sharing or instances in which the language of sharing was used. In coding selectively I applied both deductive and inductive approaches using the term 'sharing' as a meta definition and thus also sought instances of lending, borrowing, receiving, asking, giving, that were considered relevant to the terminology of sharing, as established in Chapter One.

In seeking to understand the habitus of research participants as it related to practices and understandings of sharing in their suburban field, I was guided in the analysis by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) to look for situations of match and mismatch between people's experiences and values and the contexts in which they found themselves. As such, I always contextualised people's comments within not only their own stories but also within the wider context of suburban Australia. For example, if a participant mentioned that they felt awkward when they met their neighbour in the street I was inclined to further unpack and interpret the broader context of that meeting. I would consider my knowledge, gleaned from the interview or written correspondence of the individual involved. If a participant had previously explained that they were shy, or had previously

experienced traumatic events involving neighbours, I was able to use this knowledge to help make sense of how they spoke about neighbourly relations. Ultimately it was I, as the researcher, who derived the analytical meanings from research conversations. I decided what codes were most relevant and, indeed, the categories used to code based on my analysis of the themes emerging from the data. As such my interpretations of the data as a whole are likely to be different to the interpretations of research participants themselves and indeed any others examining the raw data.

Presenting data

The following chapters integrate both findings and discussion. Such integration allows for the gradual layering up of argument and for the details of discussion to unfold as they become relevant. Direct quotations from research participants are attributed, via pseudonyms, to each individual. Each participant also has either SH or MPE at the end of their name indicating the sample to which they belonged and the code 'Int' or 'Let' and a number denoting what interview or letter the quote has been pulled from. The analysis explores both convergence and divergence between the two sample populations.

Chapter 5

‘A dance that we learn’:

The social norms of suburban life



5: 'A dance that we learn': The social norms of suburban life:

I tell them dance begins when a moment of hurt combines with a moment of boredom. I tell them it's the body's reaching, bringing air to itself. I tell them it's the heart's triumph, the victory speech of the feet, the refinement of animal lurch and flight, the purest metaphor of tribe and self. It's life flipping death the bird (L. Moore 2009, p.105).

The social norms of suburban life, according to MPE resident Luke, are “a dance that we learn” (LukeMPE:Int1). Like learning a dance, neighbourly relationships are sometimes awkward and boundaries overstepped: he steps on her toes; she steps on his. She looks up red-faced. They re-set and try again, fumbling for the right hand holds, blushing if they get too close. At first the steps are awkward and clumsy, unknown to both. Concentration is visible on the dancers' faces. Eventually, it becomes automatic and the rhythm of the music steers them around the dance floor. Feet move in time without thought. Sometimes the music demands a certain closeness, other times, the space between is important. Eventually dancing eloquently just happens. The dancers have learned the steps and learned them well. New combinations of movement develop as they begin to glide unthinkingly across the floor, their bodies inhabited with a tacit knowledge of the dance. The inhabitants of suburban Australia with whom I spoke during the process of this research want to dance well with their neighbours. No one wants to look like a fool.

Comprehending the social norms that shape neighbourly interactions in the suburban field is vital to this inquiry into concepts and practices of sharing. In this chapter I lay out some of the key foundations shaping the social norms of neighbourhood practice for research participants. I begin to answer one of the questions posed in Chapter One – ‘what does it mean to live a suburban life?’ In doing this I also lay the foundations for answering the question ‘What are the most significant social norms of Australian suburban life that influence everyday sharing practices?’ It is important to note that each person's experience or account of their suburban life, their participation in the neighbourhood dance, may be influenced by experiences outside of the immediate suburban field. For example, a teacher who lives just five minutes away from their

school is likely to have a different understanding of their suburban neighbourhood field than one who commutes two hours each day to a school across town. It is therefore impossible to assume that in the course of this research I have identified a definitive Australian suburban habitus to be paired with an equally definitive Australian suburban field. Indeed as Bourdieu (1977) explains, the use of terms such as 'middle-class habitus' or 'suburban habitus' fail to grasp the personalised and individual corporeal nature of habitus. Thus while I can draw out common themes to highlight how participants perceive and understand suburban experience, I do not assert that such a 'thing' as a suburban habitus exists. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, it is not possible to have a habitus *of* anything; it is not an object in itself. Instead, habitus describes the understandings, dispositions and capacities brought to bear by the individual in a field so as to enable proficient practice.

As shown in Chapter Four, seven key orienting concepts emerged from the analysis of participant interviews and written correspondence (see Chapter Four, page 104). These key themes are rules, good citizenship, self-sufficiency, social connection, private retreat, giving, and taking. Rather than looking directly at practices of sharing (although some examples do focus on the act of sharing), in this chapter I am interested in the social norms that scaffold sharing behaviour in the context of Australian suburban life. In considering this I focus on the first three themes (rules, good citizenship and self-sufficiency) in order to establish the broader ways in which participants view their suburbs and their neighbours. I consider how participant accounts of neighbourhood life and social interactions reveal assumptions about the rules (formal and informal) of inhabitation of a suburban field, and I provide insight into the broader suburban field inhabited by participants and the social norms that govern neighbourhood interactions (including sharing).

In this chapter I first consider the importance placed on the existence and adherence to social norms by participants. MPE residents made implicit reference to social norms when they recounted interactions with neighbours and what they saw as the importance of good manners and good citizenship. Recognition of the existence of social norms was also apparent in their reflections on experiences of discomfort when norms were transgressed. In contrast, Sharehood members' awareness of social norms was only revealed through the discomfort of transgression and no references were made to the more formal configuration of social norms and good citizenship. Both MPE and

Sharehood participants also expressed strategies for managing social discomfort, displaying a variety of capacities for inhabiting a socially complex suburban field.

Knowing the dance: the importance of social norms

A key theme emerging from the data was the recognition by participants from both the Sharehood and MPEs of the importance, and existence, of social norms of neighbourly interaction. In this section I focus on how MPE participants linked adherence to social norms with ideas of 'good citizenship', a connection not made by Sharehood members. I then go on to explain how both groups were aware of the existence of social norms primarily through experiences of social transgression. In doing so, I show that recognition of, and adherence to, social norms of neighbourly interaction were taken seriously by participants and shaped suburban social practice.

Social norms and good citizenship

Good manners: 'respecting the rules around here'

We are proud individuals and we are social animals. Manners help us to resolve our double identities (Holdforth 2007, p.18).

For MPE residents, the importance of adherence to social norms was underpinned by the suburban narrative of 'good citizenship' and contributions to the common good (a narrative of suburban life as presented in Chapter Three) and this was evident in three distinct ways through 1) the value placed on 'manners', 2) the importance of self-sufficiency and 3) the ability to contribute to the common good.

In linking good citizenship to adherence to social norms and well mannered behaviour, Liz provided a good example of the sentiments held by many MPE participants. She explained, "Being a good citizen and living your life in a respectful way" (LizMPE:Int1) is what it means to be a successful resident of her MPE. When I asked her to further explain what she meant she replied that, as well as obeying the law, good citizenship was about "Living as harmoniously as best we can" and "Respecting the rules that they have around here, like, for the main things because obviously they are there for a reason" (LizMPE:Int1). For Liz, good citizenship and adherence to social norms were tied to simple behaviours such as acknowledging a neighbour when passing them in the street. When some neighbours failed to abide by this Liz felt angry and affronted,

suggesting that for her at least, some vital social rule had been transgressed. Considering a particular ethnic group in her suburb she explained, "Every time I go walking they are so rude they do not say hello at all!" (LizMPE:Int1). The way Liz saw it, regardless of the norms of their countries or cultures of origin, the fact that these people physically shared her suburban field required them to practice good citizenry by exchanging pleasantries with neighbours on the street. As Liz went on to write "I say 'Hi' to anybody I walk/run past. Just courteous. Unwritten rule in public places where walking occurs methinks" (LizMPE:Let5).

MPE resident Lauren also expected a similar type of neighbourhood courtesy. Despite intentionally waiting in her own front yard in order to catch the eye of passing residents, she was rarely acknowledged by her neighbours. Lauren explained that "[It is] really weird [that] not one person has bothered to say 'hello' from their front lawn or anything" (LaurenMPE:Int1). The acknowledgement that such behaviour was 'really weird' suggests that like Liz, Lauren considered it an 'unwritten rule' to exchange greetings with neighbours. Liz and Lauren recognised the importance of such social norms and considered adherence to them to be crucial to good suburban inhabitation. Indeed their anger and confusion at being publicly ignored by estate residents was every bit as strong as it would have been had someone smashed their car windows and broken the (formal) law.

Self sufficiency: 'being an independent person'

The best people [are] those who by thrift and self-sacrifice establish homes and bring up families and add to the national pool of savings and hope some day to sit under their own vine and fig tree, owing nothing to anybody (Menzies, 1949, n.p).

For MPE participants, the practice of good citizenship reached beyond abiding by the social niceties of everyday relations with neighbours in two particular ways: first, the ability to look after oneself and one's family and to be self sufficient, and second to contribute to the common good. To use Menzies idiom, as discussed in Chapter Three, to be a good citizen is to be a 'lifter not a leaner' (Brett 1992, p.8).

For MPE residents, feeling independent and self-sufficient contributed to a sense of personal satisfaction in their ability to inhabit their suburban neighbourhoods well (in particular Tony, Liz, Mel, Alice, Scott). For Tony, key to his sense of self-sufficiency was

his confidence in his ability to look after himself and his family. He explained that his goals were to live his life and “Still have enough income so that if I die my family can still get looked after” (TonyMPE:Int1). The assumption being that he could continue to care for them without help from others, even after his death. Other MPE residents also expressed the value they placed on independence and self-sufficiency. For example, when I asked Alice whether she would ever ask any of her neighbours for a loan of a screwdriver she said “Probably no. I kind of tend to be a more kind of independent person. Try, well, I guess I would try to solve those things by myself without bothering people... It is very important for me to be self-sufficient” (AliceMPE:Int1). Similarly, Scott displayed the importance of self-sufficiency, taking obvious pride in his ability to look after himself. When asked the same question as Alice he answered with a firm “I don’t have to!” (ScottMPE:Int1). Tony reflected that many people will not ask their neighbours to share anything saying “I think it’s a lot to do with pride, or false pride, umm ‘I have everything, I can do everything’” (TonyMPE:Int1), suggesting the strength of such strong social norms in shaping suburban neighbourly interactions. The desire to be a good citizen, a lifter rather than a leaner, has implications for the willingness of people to engage in sharing practices (which will be discussed in some detail in Chapter Seven).

The importance placed by MPE participants on the ability to be independent and self-sufficient, and its link to good citizenship, was apparent in attitudes towards those in lower socioeconomic suburbs (Liz, Tony, Maria, Scott). This was reflected in comments about particular morals of people living in different suburbs and in the value participants placed on paid employment. MPE resident Liz was scathing, saying “They don’t stop breeding. They are trash!” and “They just breed to get money off the government” (LizMPE:Int1). Liz’s anger seems related to her sense that such people free-ride on the work of good citizens, such as herself, in the form of tax-payer funded handouts. Liz did not consider unemployment and welfare dependency kindly. So confident was she, that she and I would hold a common understanding of this, that when I messaged her to say my train was running late, she responded with “hold on 2 ur shit and don’t look anyone in the eye as you go through [suburb name]” (LizMPE). Liz obviously had strong opinions of the value and worth of those she perceived as being dependent on social support.

Liz further emphasised her opinion that those in her estate were more likely to adhere to social norms of self-sufficiency and neighbourly manners than those living in neighbouring suburbs. She explained that when she taught at a nearby school, the

classrooms had been filled with abusive children and violent parents. When I asked her why she thought the people in her estate were different she explained that “To live here you need to be working” (LizMPE:Int1). Again, implied within her comment was that along with paid work, came an adherence to certain social norms. Scott implied a similar position when he explained that in his estate “There just seems to be a better, umm, it’s hard to say *standard* of people, but there’s less hoons around, around the streets... there’s very few unemployed people in [my local area]... you just couldn’t afford to be” (ScottMPE:Int1).

From the perspective of Liz and Scott, participation in paid work is a key element of what it means to be a good citizen. To engage in paid work is to demonstrate not only an ability to look after yourself and family (access to money was an important part of Tony’s sense of self sufficiency above), but to confirm oneself as a certain quality of person. As Denise Thompson writes, in contemporary Australian society “to be ‘unemployed’ is by definition to be a passive, lazy, shiftless scrounger unworthy of membership in ‘the community’” (1997, p.2). Malcolm Voyce, in his work on the increasing privatisation of public space, agrees with Thompson writing that “It is assumed [by developers of shopping malls in new MPEs] that those who contribute to society by virtue of their own *self support* are the good citizens entitled to the benefits of society, while those dependent on society (scroungers) need to be excluded” (2006, p.281). The work of Thompson and Voyce indicate that the sentiments of Liz, Tony and Scott exist within a broader social narrative about paid employment.

Because Liz lived in a new estate that was surrounded by low socioeconomic areas with a poor reputation – the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) places the locality as one of the top 10 most disadvantaged suburbs in the Melbourne area – she was particularly keen to distinguish herself from those she perceived to be second-class citizens. Williams and Pocock found evidence of this sentiment in their work, arguing that many people choose to live in estates because of the sense that they would contain “a better class of person” (2009, p.1). For Liz, this meant that she took pleasure in the surprise on people’s faces when they visited her house: Liz and her housemate explained how much they enjoyed impressing people who came to visit them because, as she said “[Despite the locality] you’re not ashamed to show people the house” (LizMPE:Int1). Supporting her position, Liz’s housemate exclaimed “I like that as soon as they turn in [to the estate] – especially as a lot of my friends go ‘Oh it’s near [suburb name]’ [and expect it to be

awful] – [then they turn in] and they are like ‘Oh my God, wow!’” (LisMPE:Int1). This physical act of turning into a new estate, a delineation between ‘them’ and ‘us’ is explained by Voyce who argues that “the growth of gated communities, [is] driven by the fears of personal security and the desire of people to separate themselves from the welfare poor” (2006, p.278). While Liz’s estate is not properly gated, it has distinctive boundaries and a walled entranceway. The comments of MPE participants such as Tony and Liz, articulate the value of residential estates, such as the one in which Liz lives, for residents desiring to distance themselves from the spectre of poverty, disorder and violence. I argue that this is not just for reasons of material security – security of identity plays a key role and this will be discussed in some depth in Chapter Six.

Liz’s comments also relate to the strong theme around visible consumption that was present in interviews and written correspondence with MPE residents. That she lived in a new estate full of people who were visibly financially self-sufficient was in part why she took so much pleasure in showing people where she lived. Liz further demonstrated her perceived link between visible consumption and estate norms when she explained her reasons for buying a new car. Speaking about moving into the estate Liz said “When you’ve got a new house you expect there to be a nice car” while Liz’s housemate commented “I had such a poxy car when I moved up here... [so] I went out and bought a new car. Or a second hand new car”. Emphasising the normative significance of the ‘newness’, Liz added “I did the same thing, I bought a new car when we moved here” (LisMPE:Int1). Reflected in their comments is the need to conform to similar displays of consumption as others in the estate – recognition that within the estate certain social norms of consumption were expected.

The very act of consumption, and the choices made about what was consumed, played an important role in the construction of social norms for many MPE residents (Lauren, Scott, Tony, Maria, Mike, Kylie, Mel). The links made between residents’, affluence (through paid employment) and success ran parallel to notions of good citizenship. Lauren articulated this when she said “You know I think, well... [my neighbours’] idea is perhaps you know... success is about, you know, making money and then displaying I guess that you have money” (LaurenMPE:Int1). I asked MPE residents what it meant to them to be successful and in their answers all of them made reference to access to money and the sense of independence that came with it. Four of the eleven MPE participants made comments that supported Lauren’s observations. For example, Scott

said that a measure of success for him was “How many toys I’ve got!” explaining that he “Just like[s] to be comfortable” (ScottMPE:Int1), while Tony viewed success as “How soon can I sell the company and buy all the sick shit that I want to buy” (TonyMPE:Int1).

MPE participants Mel and Maria also showed how suburban residents were judged on their ability to succeed in society based on their visible consumption choices. Reflecting on how she judged people to be successful in her suburb Mel explained that

I think based on the street, we really notice [if] houses are very neat, the gardens, I think... until you know people, it’s... definitely based on what you see... I suppose, until you really know what people are like that you think ‘Oh they’ve got two nice cars in their drive, house always looks good’, you know that sort of thing that’s what you would base it on (MelMPE:Int1).

Mike and Kylie made similar observations while Maria also made judgements about people from certain suburban locations based on their consumption choices. Maria is a shop assistant and had recently been transferred to a shop in a different suburban centre where she saw the clientele as being from a lower class than her. This was expressed in the following story:

We have a whole line of Playboy [linen]. It’s *Playboy*. And I mean it looks beautiful and shiny, but it’s Playboy. Ahh, and you can buy it for... a honeymoon or, I don’t know what you can buy for, but it’s a hit at [the store I have been transferred to]. Mothers buy this stuff for their daughters! Really slutty stuff! (MariaMPE:Int1).

Maria makes it obvious that she considers the women buying Playboy sheets to be exhibiting a lack of taste. She reinforces this opinion by continuing:

In [my previous shop] no one even looked at this stuff. [As a shop assistant] you wouldn’t dare to say ‘Ah, how about looking at this stuff?’... because the person would be out of the shop immediately.

Anyway, a lady comes in and says ‘I’m looking for a quilt cover for my [21 year old] son’. I’m offering her stripy stuff and she’s saying ‘I need something classy’. And I’m saying ‘Alright so what do you understand as classy?’ ‘Do you want something more classic?’ [And she says] ‘No, I want something classy!’ So I showed her something else and then she saw this Playboy set and said ‘This! This is exactly what I want!’

So that's the whole mentality, classy is shiny (MariaMPE:Int1).

While Liz, Scott, Tony and Mel all clearly linked success in at least some way to financial capital, Maria's example is somewhat different. Rather than being about the ability of her customers to financially *afford* to purchase linen, Maria was making a judgement about their taste. In essence, she was critiquing their access to cultural capital and their ability for discernment. Bourdieu's work *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (1990b) has influenced recent class analysis as it provides a framework for understanding how capital can position individuals in social space. For many MPE participants, public displays of consumption provided evidence of the access to cultural capital held by those around them; some were judged to be 'like them', while others were found lacking. For further discussion of this, Dowling et al. (2010) provide an interesting examination of the links between built form and processes of social distinction in Australian MPEs in their paper *Privatism, Privatisation and Social Distinction in Master-Planned Residential Estates*.

Discussions of class and the role it plays in contemporary society have begun to re-emerge in the academic literature after a 30 year hiatus (Pini et al., 2012). In particular there is an increasing body of work (Hey 2006; Realy 2003; Realy 2006; Vincent et al. 2008; Dowling 2009) focussing not only on the occupation and income but on "culture and psychic" (Pini et al. 2012). While this collection of work focuses primarily on contemporary enactments of class in the British context, Pini et al. (2012) successfully apply the same analysis to Australian considerations of class in their paper *Class Contestations and Australia's Resource Boom: The Emergence of the 'Cashed-up Bogan'*. Pini et al. explain that like the UK counterpart 'Chav', 'Bogan' is "a ubiquitous term of abuse for the white poor" (2012, p.145). Raisborough and Adams adds that "Bogans are seen to lack income and are welfare dependent..." (2008, p.11). The Bogan thus begins to sound a lot like the second class citizens referred to by MPE residents. Of course Cashed-up Bogans are differentiated from Bogans by their access to financial capital, yet as Pini et al. argue, this does not mean they are accepted by the middle classes as "we come to know the figure of the Bogan through a set of dispositions, practice and proclivities which are coded as pathologically and morally deficient" (2012, p.146). Good citizenship as alluded to by many MPE participants was not solely about financial independence and self-sufficiency, but was tied to the ability to conform to the norms of

the Australian middle class and this was displayed through consumption choices (be they types of cars, a well kept lawn, or the type of linen they buy).

The political rhetoric of 'good citizenship'

Running parallel to the comments of MPE residents about the importance of financial independence, and the assumptions about expected behaviour that goes with it, is a large body of political rhetoric. This rhetoric influences how participants understand the suburban field as being a place for good citizenship and is tied to broader suburban narratives as described in Chapter Three. In 2011, Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave a speech on 'the dignity of work' in which she promised money to help the unemployed find work. She explained: "We have always acknowledged that access to opportunity comes with obligations to seize that opportunity. To work hard, to set your alarm clocks early, to ensure your children are in school" (2011a, n.p.). In a speech just some weeks prior, Gillard had explicitly described the Australian Labour Party as "the party of work, not welfare... the party of responsibility not idleness" (2011b, n.p.). Similarly, Tony Abbot, the leader of the opposition holds a similar view and the focus of his reply speech to the 2012 National Budget articulates his position on the value of paid work; namely, that: "government should protect the vulnerable, not to create more clients of the state but to foster more self reliant citizens" and "people who work hard and put their money aside so they won't be a burden to others should be encouraged, not hit with higher taxes" (2012, n.p.).

It is against this backdrop of what it means to be a good citizen, in the context of contemporary suburban Australian MPEs that participants understand and make sense of appropriate practices and behaviours. Gleeson argues that the "new social vision [of contemporary Australian politics] is rooted in conservative Victorian values – thrift, independence and temperance – reworked and updated as aspiration, self provision and values (the latter signalling a particular, that is conservative, moral outlook)" (2006a, p.80). While not all participants will have listened directly to political speeches, such political rhetoric represents powerful cultural traditions that influence all aspects of Australian life, including values and social norms. In espousing such visions, politicians are doing two things. First, they are providing explicit guidelines about what it means to be a good Australian citizen and what types of behaviours are recognised and valued. And secondly, they are re-presenting back to the public ideas about existing social norms of citizenship and form a formal and informal part of the teachings of what it

means to *be* a good Australian citizen. The value placed by MPE participants on ideals of self-sufficiency is important as it contributes significantly to how suburban identities are performed and understood and therefore how social norms are developed and maintained.

Contributing to the common good

The link between good citizenship and the inward focus of self-sufficiency seems somewhat paradoxical as citizenship is generally understood as the acknowledgement of belonging or allegiance to a great whole, while independence and self-sufficiency eschews the need for this. However, as was demonstrated in Chapter Three, a number of apparently contradictory stories of suburban existence and belonging can exist concurrently. Indeed it seems that the ability to look after oneself while feeling a part of a larger whole is what creates the stability of suburban existence and that citizenship is to share the common identity of being a lifter not a leaner.

MPE participants understood that a part of adhering to the norms of good citizenship was seen to be the ability to look out for the common good. Most MPE residents were eager to express the ways they contributed to the common good of the community. For example Scott noted the responsibility he took for the security of his neighbourhood, explaining how he looked out over the local part while he was working from his office in the garage. He said "Because I work late, my garage doors open, and I'm sorta like the unofficial security guard for the park" (ScottMPE:Int1). The tone of Scott's voice indicated the pride he took in his ability to be useful to his community. Tony contributed to his community in a different way and in explaining to me how he did it expressed his poor opinion of the willingness of others to contribute in the same way. He said:

People go to look at all the [Christmas] lights next door. The guy is putting himself out there by doing it, umm and he literally hides, not hides, but is very shy when people ask him about it. So we've got him a \$150 gift voucher [for the hardware] that we're going to give him for Christmas. [We want to acknowledge that] this is the second year and we know it costs heaps so we'll make a donation.

I am going to go round to some of the houses where some of the kids come from that go there [to look at the lights] and say 'I bought this, do you want to contribute and we'll put your address down on the envelope?' And I bet no one does. Pigs. (TonyMPE:Int1).

In the telling of this story Tony not only reveals his sense that manners of neighbourly interaction require him to contribute to the common good, but he also shows his disappointment that others will not also be adhering to such social norms. Further discussion of participant desires to contribute to the common good is left to Chapter Seven.

For Mark Latham, former leader of the Australian Labour Party and avid proponent of Australia's suburbs, community care and citizenship are tightly linked. He writes, "Citizenship is about legal rights. But it is also about social responsibility... I believe in a society of good neighbours and good community" (2004, n.p.). Similarly, van Eijk (2012) and Crow et al (2002) argue that many people seek to maintain relationships with neighbours because of an inherent belief in the value of 'good neighbouring'. As Crow et al explain "'good' neighbours needed to show an active concern for others around them" (2002, p.136). To be a leaner not a lifter is to be aware of the social benefits, and the social prestige and sense of worthiness that comes from being perceived not only as self sufficient, but as able to better both oneself and the community.

Discomfort at the neighbourhood dance

Up until now, discussion has focussed primarily on how MPE residents implicitly linked the importance of adhering to social norms to ideas of good citizenship. This link not explicitly present in data from the Sharehood. That is not to say that Sharehood members did not recognise the existence, or importance, of social norms, rather it was expressed in a different way. Awareness of social norms was also revealed, for both MPE residents and Sharehood members, through accounts of social discomfort. These accounts show not only important tensions in the execution of socially appropriate behaviour, but also that participants recognised the existence of, and need to adhere to, social norms of suburban neighbourhood interaction. Participants from both groups recounted experiences of social discomfort as a result of: 1) the dynamic nature of the relationship between context and social norms, 2) uncertainties about the translation of social norms from consciously known social 'rules' to embodied practice, and 3) personal experience in transgressing, or observing the transgression, of social norms of neighbourly interaction.

The dynamic relationship between context and social norms

The relationship between context and social norms is complex. As discussed in Chapter Two, for a person to thrive in any given social space, they must have within them the capacity for enacting field appropriate behaviour. This becomes tricky when subtle changes are made to social context. In order to gain insight into the social norms of a specific domestic practice, I asked participants from the Sharehood and MPEs to reflect on their social norms in relation to domestic dinner parties. I asked, "Imagine that you've had some people over to dinner for the first time. You don't know them well, but well enough to invite them over. At the end of the night they offer to wash up. What do you do?" All six participants who answered the question expressed elements of flexibility in their practices. Bea (Sharehood) answered my question in a letter, writing, "The politics of 'who does the dishes?' Depends on how I feel on the night. Sometimes I don't like putting guests to work... sometimes people just jump in, sometimes I am tired and just want people to leave. People sometimes offer, which is nice – I guess" (BeaSH:Let7). Similarly Lauren (MPE) explained that if a guest offered to help wash up that she'd probably say "No, no please don't do that". She clarified by explaining "If I didn't know them very well I'd just think 'No, no...'. But I think you know most people would probably offer to do it and yeah, I wouldn't fight it too much if they insisted" (LaurenMPE:Int1). For both Bea and Lauren, their willingness to allow guests to wash up depended, in part, on how well they knew their visitors.

Liz clearly expressed the subtleties involved with the social norms of post-dinner washing up writing:

I have double standards. If it was at my place, I wouldn't expect people to tend to any dishes. However if I was at someone else's house, I'd be happy to do their dishes. Depending on what mood I'm in and how well I know them – if I knew people well enough, if they started the dishes [then] I've not usually realised as I've been entertaining, attending to people etc.

Maybe another factor is that I have a dishwasher so I usually stack things in there as I chat, so it's not such a chore. The items not suitable for a dishwasher I'd wash as I chatted or leave until guests go. I usually tell people to leave stuff and I'll do it later (LizMPE:Let3).

Liz's statement suggests an ongoing negotiation and attention to context that occurs in decisions made about appropriate behaviour. This is an interesting example of the subtleties of habitus, revealing the dynamic nature of the relationship between context and social norms as Liz recognises the various factors shaping her attitudes towards washing up practices; the people present, her own mood, and the technology available. There need only be a subtle shift in context for the appropriateness of certain behaviours to shift. A slight change in dinner guests may have the social power to shift what behaviour is considered normal and appropriate.

While Mel (MPE) was one of the six who expressed elements of flexibility in her willingness to let dinner guests wash up, she was the only one who had an articulated rule for determining the relationship between guests and domestic housework. Mel explained:

We grew up with the three visit rule – if you visited three times you were no longer a guest and if you wanted a drink 'Go and get a drink', if you wanted to help with the dishes, 'Help with the dishes'. But yeah we always had that three visit rule. After your three visits you're expected to get yourself your drink, pitch in and stuff, and yeah that's how we always go with that... (MelMPE:Int1).

Mel's rule of thumb enabled her to gauge at what point a guest became a part of the family and was therefore subject to a different set of social expectations than would be applied to a 'guest'.

Fear of transgression: translating 'rules' to embodied practice

The dynamic nature of the social norms of post-dinner party wash-up did not necessarily invoke discomfort for participants. This is because it is a commonplace negotiation of social norms that people are well socialised to and as such expect the practice of negotiation to occur. It was a dynamic that they were generally comfortable with. Yet participants from both groups talked or wrote about instances in which the negotiation of practice, the uncertainty around social norms and protocols, led to feelings of discomfort.

Nick, from the Sharehood, gave a particularly clear example of the discomfort felt by participants in situations of uncertainty about the details of social norms of neighbourly interaction. While I rely heavily on Nick's example over the next few pages, similar

sentiments were expressed by Bea and Penny (Sharehood) and by Mike and Kylie (MPE).

Nick wrote:

Last week I gave all [my neighbours] bunches of parsley from my parents' garden. I felt very homely, and, with the sisters who'd just moved in, almost over-the-top friendly. I mean is it still ok to be so welcoming? It occurred to me as I stood in their doorway clutching a bunch of parsley that they might think I am a bit weird (NickSH:Let1).

In writing this, Nick reveals an uncertainty about appropriate behaviour when he seeks reassurance about the way in which he greeted newcomers. When I asked him why he was concerned about his actions, his response indicated that in offering parsley he was perhaps stepping outside of what most people would consider 'normal' behaviour. He replied "I guess I felt it wasn't ok to be so welcoming because no one has ever welcomed me that way to a street I've moved into" (NickSH:Let2). For Nick then, his tacit understanding of 'normal' and his ability to *be* normal, his habitus constructed via his own experiences, was limited and led to a sense of social unease. No previous experience in his street, or indeed in any other neighbourhood he had lived in, indicated that the offering of a homely gift (such as parsley) was socially acceptable. Yet neither did Nick's habitus provide any indication that parsley-giving in itself was inherently a breach of social norms. He felt uncomfortable because: "Such things seem like the proper province of elderly ladies, rather than youngish men. I thought perhaps they might think I was hitting on them or that I was part of some strange cult" (NickSH:Let2).

Nick tacitly understood the positive social value in welcoming neighbours as a kind of social duty. Yet he was concerned that the specific way in which he went about it might be wrong. He understood that the giving of homely gifts was likely to be a socially acceptable practice only for particular demographics – such as elderly women. Awkwardness arose for Nick as he felt at odds with the role he believed he was expected to play as a young man in the suburban neighbourhood. His reflections show a high level of awareness of the existence (real or imagined) of a set of social norms for appropriate neighbourly interaction and a desire to abide by them.

As a form of articulated social norms, Holdforth argues that contemporary Australian society lacks manners. As a result, she writes that this means that "we have no formula for successfully relating to each other" (2007, p.17) and explains that because of this,

When we cross paths [in the street with an unknown neighbour] we shift our eyes or mumble *Hi* – but it's awkward. No one wants to cross that dreaded threshold into cosy familiarity or, God forbid, mutual obligation. Here is where manners would come in handy. In a more mannered world we'd simply get the introductions over with, have a cup of tea and then return to a pleasant but formal distance (2007, p.17).

Yet in Nick's case it was not a lack of awareness of social conduct that challenged his behaviour, rather a sense of confusion and uncertainty as to what behaviour would be most appropriate given *his* personal context.

Bea, also from the Sharehood, experienced similar uncertainty about her adherence to the social norms of the neighbourhood. Like Nick, Bea was aware of the danger of appearing too eager or keen to develop closer relationships with people. She wrote of her first experience in a local community garden and how she had accidentally done the weeding in another person's patch. The man was very thankful for her help and gave her some of his vegetables, yet Bea felt uncomfortable with what she had done. She said, "I didn't realise I had been weeding his patch. I just went for it. I must be careful not to appear too friendly. That can cause problems" (BeaSH:Let5). As far as I understand it, Bea was concerned about offending the man's wife and appearing not only too socially needy, but ignorant of the social norms associated with private property and ownership of garden plots. While this interpretation may be incorrect, she was certainly wary about appearing 'over keen', echoing Nick's sentiment above.

Bea was particularly concerned about the need to maintain a semblance of 'proper' behaviour because she felt that her own lack of conformity to some social norms made people feel awkward. Bea wrote to me about a writing course that she was doing and how she was reading books "Hoping to find some evidence, other examples and arguments, so I would be given approval to go outside the accepted and 'correct' ways I 'should' write" (BeaSH:Let2). She explained that reflecting on her academic experience and desires had made her think about

The community and Sharehood. I also think about my failure (in large) to take on the roles that I were told was mine. I understand that my refusal makes others who have accepted these roles wary of the likes of me. I have not been a 'mother', a 'bride' or a 'debutante' (BeaSH:Let2).

To Bea, the fact that she did not conform to certain social norms that were, or had been, expected of her meant that she wary of other peoples judgement. In particular she was concerned that because she had not conformed, she might be considered unpredictable in her behaviour and that people may not trust her ability to conform to other sorts of norms such as interactions with neighbours.

In addition, Nick's discomfort was less about his conscious challenging of existing social norms and more to do with a lack of obvious signs as to the social acceptability of his behaviour. Nick's problem was not that he was lost amongst a vast diversity of suburban habitus and field, but rather his specific actions were outside relevant fields of experience. That Nick is inclined to behave in ways more commonly associated with other demographics, and without prior experience with regards to likely reactions to his behaviour suggests that social norms are changing at a rapid pace; indeed this change may be so rapid that the capacity for understanding the implications of change has not yet been 'learnt'.

The uncertainty felt by Nick and Bea as to what constituted appropriate behaviour in their suburban fields may stem from attempts to practice and inhabit ideals of suburban living for which they have a weakly developed habitus. Confusion about appropriate behaviour was also compounded by a wariness of transgressing social norms in ways that may have been construed as disrespectful or intrusive. Because of this desire to remain respectful, Nick and Bea demonstrated a sense of caution about pushing the bounds of socially acceptable behaviour.

If Nick and Bea's suburban habitus are in part formed by narratives of suburban privacy and retreat, their uncertainty about un-solicited friendliness makes sense. Australian social commentator Hugh Mackay, observes our obsession with privacy in his fictional work on Australian suburban life. Mackay notes the implications such an obsession may have for our ability to engage with our neighbours. He writes:

Conventional wisdom says death is the last taboo in Western societies; in suburban culture, the last taboo is direct, confrontational, investigative conversation. We are more inhibited by our obsession with privacy – our own and each other's – than by any of the lurid sexual repressions that are supposed to cripple us. The so-called respect for privacy constrains our forays into each other's worlds to

such an extent that most of the treasures on offer are never unearthed (2002, p.131).

Penny (Sharehood) recognised these norms of privacy and noted how they constrained her ability to ask her neighbours for favours. When I asked Penny whether she would ask a neighbour for an onion if she suddenly found herself short, she replied that she was more likely to drive to the shops because it was 'more convenient' and because of the fear of intruding on others. I asked her what it takes to get over such a barrier and she responded with

Oh I think it's just literally you have to make up your mind... In the past [I would] kind of agonise over, 'Oh I need to go and ask that person...' You know that whole procrastination thing. Now I just think 'Oh well really, what's the worst that can happen?' It's the interpretation or the fear [of] people, place, in any situation and it just doesn't need to be there, it's just not real (PennySH:Int1).

When I asked Penny to explain herself further she said,

So I think a lot of this stuff. It's about personal, your own personal development too, because a lot of this I really learnt, from doing, doing some hard yards about, what stories we tell ourselves and what little, umm, little patterns we've got going in our head that stop us from doing things more positively (PennySH:Int1).

Captured in her comments 'what stories we tell ourselves' and the 'little patterns we've got going' is an implicit understanding of the power of habitus, developed over time in response to various social and environmental cues, which shape everyday practices and relations. While Penny's comments point to the psychological dimensions of this in her reference to personal development, such development comes through challenging and questioning elements of habitus as they constrain or enable certain desired behaviours. Penny's statement indicates the existence of a capacity for self awareness and reflection on the factors influencing her aptitude for certain types of social interaction.

In contrast to the experiences of Sharehood members, MPE resident Alice demonstrated her discomfort with the requirements of adherence to social norms in a different way. Alice explained that if a neighbour knocks on her door, in order for her to be polite, she feels she must invite them in. For Alice, given how strongly she feels that inviting them

in is 'the right thing to do', a neighbour knocking on her door would be very stressful, especially if she did not know them well. I asked her why this would be so and she replied "It takes a while to understand whether we actually like the people that might show up, and with neighbours it's like there's no such choice..." (AliceMPE:Int1). Alice indicates that while she might feel comfortable with friends turning up on her doorstep, neighbours are in a sense strangers who can legitimately (according to her perceived social norms) knock on her door, yet this makes her intensely uncomfortable. As she went on "We would not like them just dropping by because we would have to kind of stop what we were doing and you know, pretend to be nice" (AliceMPE:Int1). That Alice would feel so awkward reveals the perception of the existence of a social norm which requires neighbourly hospitality, leaving no space to say 'no'.

No MPE participants talked as directly as Nick and Bea about uncertainties regarding their own capacities to translate the 'rules' of social behaviour into embodied practice. However Tony (MPE) suggests that a reason for confusion about the practical minutiae of suburban social norms may be the rapid shift in the cultural make-up of suburbs. He suggests that such fast changes to social expectations and norms are leading to suburban fields in which fewer people understand the protocols of neighbourly interaction. Tony explained:

People will have someone come and build their patio, whereas ten years ago the three blokes could come and all: one would bring a circular saw; one would bring a jig and you would all do it together and have a few beers. No one does that [anymore]. Not that I've seen. And I think that's got to do with different cultures as well. The Indian guys don't know to bring a slab of beer... and the Lebanese guys don't know to bring their power saw and the Chinese guy doesn't know he should bring a drill (TonyMPE:Int1).

Tony's comments raise two interesting points. First is his observation about the shift in social norms of housing construction and renovation. In Chapter Three I described the move from the use of collective labour in the construction of suburban houses in the form of building societies, to the buying in of labour. Second, Tony recognises not only that Australian social norms have changed, but that many suburban residents now bring with them a completely different cultural experience and one which lacks insight into historical norms of behaviour relating to shared construction projects. (For further

discussion on the implications of rapid in-migration on social norms and collective action (see Ostrom, 2000).

The second point raised in Tony's observation relates to the increasingly multicultural nature of new suburban development and the implications this has for social norms. Similarly Kylie noted the difference between norms of behaviour for neighbourhood socialisation in Australia and her experiences in South Africa. She explained that she didn't really understand how Australians socialised saying "So I basically never go to [anyone's house], because we have like a barbeque [and] they'll have a party and that's two different things" (KylieMPE:Int1). Mel observed something similar explaining that the population of the school she taught at (in a nearby MPE) was made up of "A lot of Indian, Asian, yeah... We've got 47 different nationalities in 167 children" (MelMPE:Int1). While she welcomed such cultural diversity she noted the impact that it had on some of the cultural institutions and norms around fundraisers and community events such as the 'traditional' school sausage sizzle explaining:

[The implications are] huge... a lot of Buddhist and Hindu families, so I mean beautiful people... But it's just a lot of, such a wide variety of cultures and yeah, we've sworn we'll never ever do [another] sausage sizzle... They are like, 'Are they Halal sausages?' 'Do you have a vegetarian option?' 'Do you have this...?' It was just, it got too big! (MelMPE:Int1).

Some MPE residents, Australian born and recent immigrants, recognised the significance of the changing cultural make up of Australian suburbs. While not against such diversity in itself, most recognised that this was causing some sense of discomfort or uncertainty around social norms of suburban neighbourly interaction. Gesthuizen et al. (2009) argue that

The more diverse a social context actually is in terms of different (ethnic) groups, the less people of one's 'own kind' there are around with whom people feel familiar and with whom people can socially identify, the less people feel comfortable with others and the more they distrust others and the less they will socially connect to other people, even to people of their 'own kind' (2009, p. 123).

Yet the experiences of participants suggest that changing cultural make-up of the suburbs does not necessarily lead to distrust, or intentional avoidance, rather the

absence of shared understandings of 'the right thing to do' means many people lack the capacity to know how to effectively engage with each other (for further consideration of multiculturalism and the challenges of suburban social interaction see Noble (2005)).

Experiencing transgressions of social norms

The third way that participants expressed discomfort and an awareness of the existence of social norms was through experiences of transgression. Liz was the only participant, from both groups, to recount so clearly an experience in which social norms of neighbourhood interaction had been so obviously transgressed. Liz and her neighbour both experienced feelings of discomfort and shame due to the actions of drunken guests at their respective parties. At a party hosted by Liz's neighbours some of the guests became rowdy, escalating a disagreement into a loud and violent fight in the street. Liz wanted to appear understanding and thus helped the neighbours to deal with the situation. The next day she left them a note reassuring them things were 'alright' and that she didn't blame them for the previous night's disturbance. Some months later it was Liz's turn to feel embarrassed as a similar incident occurred at a party she was hosting. According to Liz, the fact that both she and her neighbours had to deal with such embarrassments meant that things "Kind of evened out" (LizMPE:Let4). From Liz's experience it seems she was keenly aware of the expectations surrounding appropriate neighbourhood behaviour, and that these were particularly strong around issues of violence and late night disturbances; behaviours considered inappropriate in the public setting of the suburban front yard. This is understood by Liz and her neighbour, as is evidenced in the discomfort they both obviously felt and the subsequent relief when things 'evened out'.

Enjoying the dance: strategies for managing discomfort

Strategy #1: The Sharehood

Participants from both the Sharehood and MPEs had a number of different strategies, explicit and implicit, for managing uncertainty and discomfort around suburban social norms. For Sharehood members, participation in the Sharehood was a way to facilitate the negotiation of neighbourly relationships for two key reasons; the Sharehood provides a legitimate excuse for interaction, and interaction can occur online. Drawing

on the dance metaphor, the Sharehood acts like a dance-caller indicating which moves are required and when, as the result of both the formal nature of the Sharehood and its online presence. Interestingly, while the Sharehood website sets out formal guidelines for sharing interactions (see Appendix K) this was never referred to by participants.

As explained in Chapter Four, the Sharehood exists not only as an online platform for facilitating the exchange of goods and services between neighbours in the same geographical location, but it also encourages and emphasises the importance of social events in helping to build community and facilitate sharing. This means that the Sharehood helps to navigate social discomfort and uncertainty by creating legitimacy in a number of different ways. First, for those participants who want to get to know their neighbours and want to share things with them, the Sharehood provides an already existing and externalised framework for interaction. Nick explained that many people in his neighbourhood felt awkward about getting to know their neighbours and “So the Sharehood has helped because it makes other people more comfortable in saying ‘Hello’, I think. It’s an excuse; it’s an ice breaker. You walk down the street and people need a reason to be able to look up or, you know, say ‘Hello’” (NickSH:Let3). Participation in the Sharehood helped to develop a point of commonality between neighbours and reason to speak with one another. Nick went on to explain, “It’s kind of like an excuse to talk. ‘Cause you can say ‘Oh I’ve got this thing...’ [or] ‘There’s this group’”. Nick used the introduction of the Sharehood as a reason to approach his neighbours explaining that “A couple of times I’ve delivered [Sharehood] fliers around and so then people would come to an event it’s like ‘Oh are you part of the Sharehood?’ [and conversation goes on] ‘Blah blah blah blah’” (NickSH:Int1). In turn, by giving them the flier, Nick also recognised that his neighbours then felt that they had a legitimate reason to attend a community event. Second, it was assumed that because, at the time of this research, people could only access goods and services from those within a 400 metre radius, neighbours would get to know each other better as a result of sharing through the Sharehood.

As well as being an excuse to interact, the Sharehood helped to articulate some of the details of social interaction with neighbours (although I limit the discussion of this here and save detailed considerations of sharing for Chapter Seven). Penny was setting up a Sharehood with the help of another women which meant writing a letter to be letterbox dropped and working out how and what they wanted to say, and thinking about

community events they could run to promote the sharing network. Penny explained that:

Setting it up with someone else, where you can talk about your experiences and help each other. [You] can even have a conversation about [whether] it is appropriate to borrow a cup of sugar. You know then you have kind of set the scene for everybody... you actually know what is acceptable in that group dynamic and what isn't (PennySH:Int1).

While Penny and her neighbour may have decided what they thought was acceptable in a group dynamic, the only way they had of communicating acceptable behaviour was through the invitation to participate that they were going to drop into neighbours' letterboxes. Penny added that "If I was setting it up on my own I'd find that daunting..." and I understand this to be because of her fear of transgressing some unwritten social norm of neighbourly interaction. Let's say that Penny promoted a Sharehood on her own, and suggested in her invitation what she thought were acceptable Sharehood behaviours. If others in the neighbourhood are shocked or disagree with her suggestions, then Penny herself runs the risk of being seen as promoting behaviours that do not conform to the social norms of the neighbourhood. In contrast, if Penny *and* another neighbour publicly agree on an acceptable behaviour it is more likely to be considered normal (Griskevicius et al. 2008).

James started the Sharehood in his suburb on his own. Reflecting back he said he would do things differently in his next neighbourhood "Like organising social events more collectively with everyone and even, when I first start a 'hood, instead of just putting my name at the bottom of the letter I would, I'd probably find a few other neighbours to do it with and do it more collectively" (JamesSH:Int1). In James' case, he had found that by being the only name on the bottom of the Sharehood invitation, people in his Sharehood looked to him to initiate community events and considered him to be the one who dictated the social norms of Sharehood participation. James spoke about all the community events he had organised, such as a community garden, garage sales and barbeques and how he felt he was the only one ever making the effort:

And so... I went to just organising picnics 'cause they were so much easier... Then... ahh I don't know. I think I got burnt out... I think I just, I wanted other people to start organising events and nobody [did]... but,

I just, after a while I was like, I can't do this anymore. Umm and, since then, there haven't really been many events (JamesSH:Int1).

Comments from Bea, who is in the same neighbourhood as James, provide further evidence about the unwillingness of participants to initiate events. She explained that although James and others were very welcoming and inclusive, it "Has to sort of be their gig, it's not my thing. It's not that they've told me this, it's just that I feel it" (BeaSH:Int1).

The online element of the Sharehood was appealing to both Penny and Kristin (another woman keen to establish a Sharehood in her own neighbourhood). For Penny, the online nature of the network played an important icebreaking role as it required, at least initially, much less consideration of the social norms of neighbourly interaction – removed as it was from the face-to-face context. While an increasing number of scholars argue that social norms are just as important and powerful in the context of online social media (Yee et al. 2007; Nowak 2011; Hooper & Kalidas 2012), the online space of the Sharehood is far more prescriptive than most forms of social media. Opportunities for online interaction via the Sharehood website are relatively restricted; people can post items to lend or borrow by filling in an online template or they can post an event to a 'community noticeboard', again by filling in a template (see Figure 6).

Item	Contact
Home Brew Kit in West Hobart	Contact oliverloveltas about it
Skills and Bikes! in West Hobart	Contact oliverloveltas about it
help! in South Hobart	Contact jackwebb247 about it
Co11oquial chinese in West Hobart	Contact colin about it
Practical English usage in West Hobart	Contact colin about it
Pocket Oxford Chinese dictionary in West Hobart	Contact colin about it
Abriendo Paso Gramatica in	Contact colin about it

Figure 6: Online Sharehood form

If someone finds a desired item listed in their neighbourhood, or further information about an event, they can contact another member via email through the website. Online

interaction between neighbours then shifts away from the restricted format of the website and into unregulated email communication. Yet even then, some of the negotiating around social interaction has been done. For example, it can be assumed that anyone who has posted on the Sharehood site is open to interaction with neighbours and thus making contact with them is acceptable. Even more importantly however is that, as Penny noted, the online nature of the Sharehood means a greater degree of control over *when* interactions take place:

I can spend five minutes at work, or I can do it while [my son] is doing something else and that's all I need to participate. Say, to set something up or add more information, so you can also do it at your own pace. And I think those things are quite important to facilitate our involvement (PennySH:Int1).

Not only is Penny able to do things at her own pace, she is also not afraid of intruding on other people's privacy, established previously as being an important element of contemporary Australian suburban social norms. Understood in the context of her previous comments, Penny's appreciation of the online environment was not limited to convenience. It also enabled her to participate, at least initially, in the Sharehood while being removed from the need to negotiate the finer points of social interaction. That Penny values the Sharehood as a way of negotiating social norms *and* as a way of avoiding such behavioural negotiations is perhaps contradictory, yet both reveal the potential for discomfort in practicing acceptable social norms of neighbourly interaction.

Indeed the potential for the online nature of the Sharehood to help facilitate neighbourly interactions was part of what motivated Sharehood founder Theo Kitchener to establish the website in the first place. At the *National Neighbourhoods, Real Communities* conference in 2009, Theo explained that he was sick of doing his washing at the laundromat and realised that if he knew his neighbours, he could probably use their washing machines. Being a shy person however, he felt he couldn't just go and talk to them. He explained that there was no way he was ever going to make friends with his neighbours without some 'elaborate internet scheme' (Kitchener 2009). Thus from Theo's perspective, for whatever reason, interaction with neighbours via an internet platform was somehow less intimidating than having to engage face-to-face.

While the online element of the Sharehood is recognised as an important way to begin to engage with neighbours, the whole point of the network is to facilitate more face-to-

face engagement with people. In establishing a Sharehood James acknowledged the tendency for social awkwardness to exist when neighbours were first working out the social protocols for Sharehood interaction. He suggested that a primary function of the Sharehood was to provide an opportunity for people to get together face-to-face and negotiate the social norms of suburban neighbourly (sharing) relationships. As he explained, building meaningful connections through the Sharehood was all about "Just getting people together around food and letting people be awkward until they are not awkward anymore" (JamesSH:Int1). For James, this was what motivated his efforts in organising community picnics, garage sales and movie nights. Sharehood participants drew on the Sharehood itself as an icebreaker for social interaction both because it signalled a shared interest to share and because the online function of the network helped to facilitate interaction.

Strategy#2: Personal limits and boundaries

Sharehood members *and* MPE residents also managed uncertainty and discomfort through the development of personal boundaries and personal rules for neighbourhood interactions. These techniques can be likened to the decision to only dance certain dances, to dance with him rather than her, or to only step onto the floor for a certain type of music.

A number of examples highlighting personal negotiations and development of boundaries around neighbourhood interactions emerged in conversations with Sharehood participants (James, Kristin, Bea). Bea in particular had an awareness of the boundaries and rules that she was making. For example, Bea often received apricots from a neighbour, yet as she said "He didn't want jam, he didn't want anything in exchange and it was a bit like... 'This is what we do, this apricot thing, but that is all we do'" (BeaSH:Int1). Somehow Bea had decided that the man with the apricots was only interested in a relationship with her within certain bounds (him giving excess fruit during apricot season). No matter how much Bea offered in return, or tried to interact with him out of apricot season, the limitations remained. Bea, while wishing for a great repertoire of social interaction with her neighbour, also accepted as legitimate his desire for distance. Bea and 'the apricot man' were engaged in a dance, but it was limited to only a few particular steps.

Reflecting on this relationship based around the distribution of excess produce, and her experiences growing up in rural Victoria, Bea suggested that when it comes to

neighbourhood relations “It has to be the right people for the right places”, acknowledging the importance of context, and “There has to be basically a respect for boundaries” (BeaSH:Int1). Rather than pushing her relationship with him, Bea admitted to making chutneys and jams from the apricots and then passing them around between other neighbours as a way of fulfilling her need for reciprocation without overstepping the boundaries imposed by the apricot giver. Thus while Bea felt social awkwardness in some of her interactions, her experience with the apricots demonstrates her capacity to adapt and to manage at least some elements of neighbourly interactions.

Like members of the Sharehood, MPE residents have their own techniques for managing the uncertainties of social interaction. In discussion with Lauren about how well she knew her neighbours I asked whether she would borrow an onion or a screwdriver from a neighbour. Lauren replied “Not an onion. I don’t think for food things I would, but you know probably something like a screwdriver” (LaurenMPE:Int1). On further questioning, Lauren explained that she wouldn’t ask for an onion because it was an easy and simple thing to purchase from the local shops. A screwdriver on the other hand is a more expensive item, less likely to be purchased from the nearby shops and unlike an onion can be returned immediately after use.

From one perspective Lauren’s response doesn’t seem to make much sense. In her case, ‘easily’ buying an onion from the shops meant getting in the car and driving for five minutes, finding a park at the large shopping centre, navigating the supermarket and its possible queues and then having to drive home again. Surely it would be ‘easier’ to just pop next door and ask a neighbour? The fact that Lauren would ask for a screwdriver indicates that asking *is* possible. Lauren’s example demonstrates that inherent in her engagements with neighbours is an implicit judgement as to what is and what isn’t acceptable to ask for.

In contrast, Mike explained how he had once gone out of his way to buy a garden tool that he was only going to use once. He explained “Last year I had to go and buy a wheelbarrow for a job that lasted two days because I just didn’t have the will to go and ask my neighbour across the street to borrow his. I paid \$120 for it and it now just sits there and takes up space...” (MikeMPE:Let2). Mike pulled out of the correspondence process after writing this, so I was unable to question him further in order to fully understand why he felt he ‘did not have the will’ to ask neighbours. Yet in the context of his other comments, I attribute this at least in part, to his fear of crossing the line of

acceptable behaviour. Contrasting Mike's experience to Lauren's, Mike wanted to use a relatively expensive tool compared to a cheap screwdriver. Yet what is most interesting is not the cost, but his reference to not having 'the will' and the sense that he is uncertain about whether to ask would be within acceptable social norms. Indeed it indicates the *desire* to ask, but not the capacity to act on it. In Mike's case, the potential for social awkwardness is managed through avoidance.

The conscious creation of boundaries for maintaining appropriate relationships with neighbours, and other suburban residents, by participants in this study echoes the findings of other urban scholars. For example in their study on Australian suburban life after World War Two, Murphy and Probert (2004) describe how many men tended to keep themselves at a 'distance from their locality'. This meant that while the men were happy to chat with their neighbours, they consciously remained somewhat distant through the establishment of personal boundaries. As one man is quoted as saying "I always say that there's three things the neighbours can't borrow. One is the car, the motor mower, or my wife" (Murphy and Probert 2004, p.282).

Negotiating the dance

Suburban social norms of neighbourly interaction are dynamic and, like relationships on the dance floor, are constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated. In this Chapter I have argued that MPE residents and Sharehood members are aware of social norms of behaviour in their interaction with neighbours. Many participants considered adherence to these norms important. For MPE residents the importance of adherence to social norms was partially informed by the narrative of good citizenship: to be a good citizen is to abide by the social norms of the neighbourhood and to conduct oneself in a way that indicates self-sufficiency – proof of an ability to be a 'lifter' rather than a 'leaner'.

The interviews and letters with participants from both groups revealed the existence of competing and sometimes contradictory social norms and overlapping fields that at times led to social discomfort. This discomfort was a result of an inability to reconcile some of the nuances of acceptable behaviour. Participants from both groups have strategies for managing and limiting the discomfort that comes with the translation of consciously understood norms into socially acceptable practice. In the next Chapter I consider further the capacities of participants to engage with their suburban neighbours and their experiences and attitudes shaping their opinions and values relating to

Australian suburban life. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I bring together these understandings of the social norms of interaction in Australian suburban life and consider the implications of this for what it means to share in the Australian suburbs.

Chapter 6

Close yet distant:

Strong ties and private lives



6: Close yet distant: strong ties and private lives

The most cherished of contemporary myths is the recurring dream of community. Half rose-tinted Frank Capra, half *Passport to Pimlico*, it's a fantasy that celebrates the corner shop, a borrowing of a cup of sugar from the neighbours, and all those other unimpeachable virtues that range from motherhood to apple pie (Sudjic 1992, p.279).

In order to determine how sharing is conceptualised and practised I seek to gain insight into the motivations, experiences and attitudes of participants towards neighbourly relationships in Australian suburbs. Having established the existence and awareness of social norms and the importance placed on conformity with such norms by participants, I want to delve further into the experiences and attitudes shaping suburban social life. In this chapter I consider the tension that exists between the desire of participants to interact in a meaningful way, to connect, with their neighbours and the underlying values that motivate such desire. Members of the Sharehood seek connection as a part of a broader political project of social and environmental change – the quest for ‘the sharing society’, while in contrast MPE residents are motivated more by issues of ontological insecurity. For MPE participants their desire to connect was in tension with their desire to maintain distance and to keep the suburban home as a space of private retreat. In this chapter I focus on the key themes of ‘social connection’ and ‘private retreat’ present in the data (see Chapter Four, page 104). As with Chapter Five, I do not seek to explicitly address experiences of sharing, although sharing is discussed in relation to motivations for connection. As a part of understanding how sharing is conceptualised and practised, I first ask ‘what are the underlying values that motivate attitudes and practices of neighbourly sharing?’

The desire for social connection

All participants from both the Sharehood and MPEs expressed a strong desire for more meaningful relationships their neighbours. In presenting the data I use the concept of ‘social connection’ as defined in a recent study by the Grattan Institute, *Social Cities* (2012), as a starting point for discussion:

Social connection refers to our relationships with others. More specifically, social connection is meaningful, positive, interaction between people. It makes us feel that we matter, that we are engaged with others and that we are imbedded in networks of mutual appreciation and care (Kelly et al. 2012, p.4).

I use this definition for two main reasons; first because ‘connection’ was a term used by the majority of participants in discussions about neighbourly relations, and second, social connection is directly related to the concept of social capital. Social capital, as explained in Chapter Two is the collection of resources that develop as a part of a durable network of shared acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu 1985). Social capital is increased through exhibiting relationships of trust and commitment, such as saying hello, collecting the mail for a neighbour or volunteering with a group – all of which are examples of meaningful and positive interaction (E. Cox 1995). In essence, the desire for ‘connection’ is a desire for collaboration and the creation of a *shared* wealth. Expressions of the desire for social connection emerged from interviews and letters with Sharehood members particularly strongly in relation to participation in the Sharehood, while for MPE residents it was apparent in their appreciation of connection when it occurred and in their reflections on its absence.

All members of the Sharehood expressed a desire for greater social connection with their neighbours and three of the five participants, unprompted, used the word ‘connection’ when talking about neighbourhood relationships. For example, Nick valued strong social connection in his suburban neighbourhood and explained how good it felt when it became obvious that his neighbours paid attention to his presence in the street. Having been away from his neighbourhood for a couple of months Nick was pleased to realise that his absence had been noticed and his return valued. This experience enhanced his sense of being connected to his neighbourhood by mutual and positive relationships with neighbours. Nick wrote:

One older lady who I saw a few days after my return said to me ‘Oh you’re back! [Heather] told me she thought you were back!’ They had been discussing my whereabouts – two septuagenarians paying attention to the comings and goings of their young neighbour. That made me feel good and strongly connected to my community (NickSH:Let4).

Many Sharehood participants also revealed the value they placed on social connection with neighbours when they linked it to their reasons for joining the Sharehood. Getting to know other people in a meaningful way was certainly one of the reasons for Penny's participation in the Sharehood: I described to her a local neighbourhood that gathered for street parties and barbeques, and she interrupted me saying, "Wow... Nirvana!" (PennySH:Int1). As James explained, "I think the main thing for people [joining the Sharehood] is wanting to know their neighbours, umm and wanting more of a sense of community and stuff... Yeah, I reckon for most people it's about wanting to get to know people" (JamesSH:Int1).

Desire for social connection also motivated Kristin to start a Sharehood. She explained, "Well, I suppose I'd be very interested in being part of something. Both the thought of taking part in making a change in people's lives, encouraging people to connect with each other, and how I could personally benefit from having a community" (KristinSH:Int1). When I asked Kristin how she would personally benefit she replied that "I guess... having a community in your neighbourhood, the fact that it's right there... [there would] be people who you could chat with when you go out your door. Or people might casually invite each other to their houses..." (KristinSH:Int1). Not only did Kristin want to personally benefit, but she also indicated a desire to contribute to the development of a strongly connected neighbourhood. She had an understanding that such give and take was an important part of the formation and maintenance of social capital.

Personally benefitting from neighbourhood connection was one of the signs of success of the Sharehood for James. James told the following story about his neighbour, Kaitlin, whom he met through the Sharehood:

When my cat died [and] I was home alone... I was just completely beside myself and stuff and... yeah I was able to go across the road to [Kaitlin] who I know is also obsessed with cats and, that she came and sat with me while I cried. And like and then, you know, [she] came back with bread for me so that I didn't have to go to the shops so that I could eat, and like it was, it was just really amazing (JamesSH:Int1).

For James, being cared for by Kaitlin was something that he directly associated with his participation in the Sharehood. While not necessarily 'friends', James and Kaitlin had attended a number of community picnics and dinners that had been organised through

the Sharehood. Without the Sharehood, James and Kaitlin may never have met, and may never have discovered their mutual love of cats. James' story indicates not only his appreciation of the Sharehood, but his belief in the value of caring and meaningful relationships with neighbours.

Like Sharehood participants, MPE residents also valued social connection and made this apparent by recounting positive experiences (Mel, Liz, Scott, Nancy, Alice), or their dissatisfaction with the lack of experiences of connection (Tony, Lauren, Mike, Kylie, Luke, Liz, Maria, Nancy). For example, Mel valued the way that her neighbours looked after each other, explaining that, "There's an old lady that lived in the house and her husband passed away. So there were three neighbours that all kept an eye on her and they took turns taking her shopping or, taking her to the doctors or, you know that sort of stuff" (MelMPE:Int1). For Mel, a sense of security came with knowing that people looked out for each other, and was an important part of her sense of satisfaction in her suburban life. As she said, knowing that people looked out for the old lady "really made it positive when I moved in" (MelMPE:Int1).

In contrast to Mel, Lauren expressed her appreciation of social connection and access to social capital by describing its absence. In speaking with Lauren, the desire for neighbourhood social capital was highlighted by her concern that she could not access it. Lauren lived next door to, rather than in, an MPE. Living far from the CBD amongst many recently developed estates was a new experience for her. Moving to the outer suburbs, Lauren found no sign of the closeness of neighbourly ties that she had previously experienced and that she desired:

I was talking to a friend yesterday trying to explain how there are so many women wandering around these local suburbs looking worn and fraught – I'm guessing from their child raising. They don't look you in the eye. They don't attempt to engage. Am I imagining this? My friend lives in the inner city so has no experience. I go to [the inner city suburbs] and watch people at tables chatting and looking animated and that's the life I had in the [inner city]. They are not necessarily beautiful people, but they look alive in comparison to people in suburbs like ours (LaurenMPE:Let5).

Not only did Lauren miss her previous inner suburban neighbourhood, but she found the culture of MPE-style suburbs hard to understand. Lauren found that the capital she had,

her understanding of social neighbourly interactions, a habitus for a suburban field, failed to work in her new neighbourhood (Grenfell 2008b). That Lauren doesn't 'come' from the outer suburbs gives her both insight, and a sense of awkwardness into this particular social field, and highlights the diversity of residents in the outer suburbs.

Recovering norms of suburban connection

The desire to build a particular quality of relationship with neighbours can be understood not simply as the yearning for the recognition social connection brings, but as a desire for access to reliable social capital. Bourdieu explains that social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are likened to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances" (1985, p.248). For participants from both groups, experiences of social connection were indications of meaningful social interaction, neighbourly trust, a sense of personal wellbeing associated with the suburban home, and personal security. Participants sought that 'spirit of helpfulness and friendliness' that has continually been attributed to suburban life throughout Australia's settler history. It is against such visions of a suburban past that many participants considered their contemporary neighbourhood life to be lacking in something important.

Participants expressed their disappointment that the social norms of neighbourly interaction that enhanced social connection had changed. For example, as MPE resident Nancy reflected, "If the guy in the café knows what you drink, that is awesome and hats off to him for taking time to notice. This is one of the things that we are missing in life now, is connection with other people" (NancyMPE:Let1). She also explained that "When we were little we used to play in the front yard and, you know, everyone knew everyone and that sort of thing. Now it's all kind of closed door" (NancyMPE:Int1). Liz had a similar perspective saying, "I don't know, streets aren't how they used to be. When I grew up it was likely Ramsay Street⁵ and now... you don't really get that" (LizMPE:Let5). Mike also commented on what he saw as a loss of meaningful interaction with neighbours: "We tend to live in our own worlds in a modern society and just don't care anymore about other people that we don't have a personal relationship with" (MikeMPE:Let1). The comments of these MPE residents reflect that they consider suburban relationships to

⁵ Reference to long running Australian television drama *Neighbours*.

be less connected than in the past and indicate that participants would like to recover such neighbourhood ties.

Making the same observation but from a different perspective, Tony reflected on Australian neighbourhood life in the middle of the twentieth century. As an Australian who has spent some time in Russia, Tony contrasted Russian life to that of his current neighbourhood in an MPE: “Relationships are different [in Russia], umm, the richness is in your relationships with people over there, like it was here in the ‘50s” (TonyMPE:Int1). Tony expressed an inclination to somehow retrieve the closeness of relationships that he felt had once been accessible in Australian life and that this drove his desire to live in a richly connected neighbourhood. It was via these nostalgic references to social norms of neighbourly interaction of the past that participants revealed some of their motivations for neighbourhood interaction; this sense of a lost suburban dream was an important element in the construction of many participants’ suburban habitus and understandings of how suburban life *should* be.

Similarly, Sharehood members also referenced their desire for social connection to suburban experiences of the past (Bea, Nick, Penny) and the desire to recover relationships of sharing with their neighbours. Often, this was reflected in their reasons for participating in the Sharehood. When I asked Penny whether she knew any of her neighbours she replied:

I mean, you know, you nod to people and people nod to you and, you know, but, but not [a relationship] in any true sense of the word... Mum used to send us next door to borrow a cup of sugar and, you know, all that stuff just used to be very normal in terms of neighbourhoods for us... (PennySH:Int1).

Like the others, Penny wanted to reclaim what she saw as the social norms of suburban life that had been lost and she considered participation in the Sharehood as a way to do this. She explained “With the Sharehood I think, you know, for me that’s back to basics, like how, how a neighbourhood should be” (PennySH:Int1). For Penny, a neighbourhood should be a place where going next door to borrow a cup of sugar was a ‘normal’ suburban practice.

The desire for a time and place in history where neighbourhoods were more socially connected is an important factor in the construction of experiences and expectations of

Australian suburban life for participants. The broad narrative of retreat *into* the suburban neighbourhood gives strength to such nostalgia, embedded as it is in the tacit development of suburban habitus. The desire for strong social connections with neighbours is significant and relevant to understanding how sharing is conceived and practised by participants for two reasons. First, representations of sharing as practices of positive social interaction mean that in a context in which such interaction is seen as lacking, people may be more likely to embrace the idea of sharing. Second, the desire for greater connection with neighbours locates the suburb as a field in which sharing as a social practice for generating connection *should* occur.

Motivations for connection

Members of the Sharehood and residents of MPEs both expressed very similar desires for social connection with neighbours. Both groups celebrated its presence and lamented its absence, and both considered social connection to be related to social norms of the suburban past and thus something to be recovered. Thus on the surface the differences between the two groups appear to be minimal. However beyond the sense that social connection is beneficial to the individual, the motivations for such connection were fundamentally different between the groups. For Sharehood participants the desire to contribute to the broader political project, ‘the sharing society’ discussed in Chapter One, was a part of a sophisticated understanding of suburban sustainability that drove the desire for greater social connection. In contrast, while MPE participants acknowledged the importance of social connection for the greater good of the community (framed as contributions to good citizenship as discussed in Chapter Five), deeper issues of ontological security were hugely influential in seeking such strong neighbourly relations.

The quest for the ‘sharing society’

The Sharehood is presented on its website, and in other media, as being primarily motivated by the desire to reduce resource consumption. The environmental benefits of the Sharehood are described in media as diverse as the Alternative Technology Association (ATA) magazine *ReNew* (Allsopp 2011) to *Women’s Health Magazine* (Blackburn 2011), where participation in the Sharehood is promoted as environmentally driven, with the *added* benefit of creating neighbourhood social connections. This emphasis on environmental benefits of the Sharehood led me to expect that

participants choose to engage in a sharing network for environmental reasons, based on consumption reduction. However of all the Sharehood participants, only Penny explicitly mentioned reduced consumption as a motivation for Sharehood involvement. Penny said, “It’s about having stuff in our shed that isn’t being used that bothers me... umm, just sheer efficiency, but also umm environmentally not having to buy another product if you don’t need it” (PennySH:Int1).

All but one of the Sharehood participants were motivated to participate in the Sharehood, at least partially, for environmental reasons. Yet these reasons were far more complex than reducing resource consumption. Sharehood participants had sophisticated understandings of suburban sustainability which included the importance of social connection. For these people, suburban sustainability was not simply about resource efficiency but was linked to broader patterns of neighbourhood life – including personal and community wellbeing. Nick captures the sentiments of several when he writes about the Sharehood as a vehicle for a complex synthesis of social and environmental dimensions of sustainability:

Partly the reason that I am interested in this stuff is that... I do look at the world and think it’s completely fucked... In a sense [the Sharehood] is kind of getting as close to the root of all the problems that I can... There seems to be a great sort of confluence as well, all the things that are good for us [and] fun... [A] great confluence between better living and better result for society... and environment. And to get people really engaged in a street by street, kind of house by house way seems... as close as you can get, short of some sort of re-education scheme (laughs) (NickSH:Int1).

Nick considered the current social norms of suburban life to be fundamentally flawed because they limited the ability of communities to develop social connections. Nick expressed his frustration at this, using as an example his dealings with the municipal council over the erection of a community noticeboard. Nick wanted the noticeboard as a way of engaging with neighbours who did not have the internet to access the Sharehood website. He was denied permission to install the noticeboard because the council was concerned about the damage it might do to the brick wall. Disbelieving, Nick explained “I wrote back and I was like, ‘You know bricks are pretty sturdy umm...? And in any case, you know, I’m not sure why you are more concerned about the well-being of the wall rather than the well-being of your residents’” (NickSH:Int1).

The potential for the Sharehood to catalyse desired social and environmental changes was expressed by three research participants. James explained how he sees the Sharehood as a form of “direct action” through neighbourly interaction and related community development activities. James compared his approach to addressing sustainability problems to the approaches of other environmental activists who might employ more traditional direct action tactics such as chaining themselves to bulldozers and power plants, or participating in tree-sits. James explained that “It feels to me like the people who are really interested in sharing are either students or sort of more extreme kind of environmentalists and that kind of crew. Suppose... who want to be able to figure out ways of living outside of capitalism” (JamesSH:Int1). Bea expressed a similar sentiment saying “I think really, Sharehood [and the people in it]... are the good ones coming through that will offer viable alternatives to people who can’t buy into this world [socially or financially], which I think is eating its own tail and destroying itself” (BeaSH:Int1). For James and Bea then, the Sharehood offered a kind of transformative potential advocated for by other proponents of sharing as discussed in Chapter One.

For some Sharehood members, participation in the Sharehood was a way of ‘walking the talk’; a way of life congruent with their social and environmental ideals (James, Nick, Penny, Bea). For example for Penny, the Sharehood is an opportunity to actively help create the world she wants her son to inherit. Not only does she want to limit her impact on the environment, she wants to be engaged and connect to people in her neighbourhood. Penny explained that this was because she wanted her son to have “The right exposure [to]... hopefully the right ideas and goals which really come from us [as parents]... Living the life that I want him to live I suppose is a key driver” (PennySH:Int1). Penny understood the Sharehood to be not only a way to use material possessions more efficiently but as a way to contribute to the broader political project of the ‘sharing society’.

Similarly, Nick saw the Sharehood as a powerful vehicle for modelling and promoting broader social and environmental change. Reflecting on the Sharehood activities that he had initiated, such as neighbourhood movie nights and community composting workshops, he wrote “I do think [the activities of the Sharehood] are making a difference. I’ve heard a few stories from people about the things they’ve shared, or contact they’ve made with people around them, and they are always thrilled by it” (NickSH:Let6). Such a thrill may come from an understanding that in order to share with

neighbours social connection must be strong and conversely, that every act of sharing be it material or social contributes to social connection and the collective pool of capital available to the neighbourhood. The act of sharing is not only proof of the 'spirit of friendliness' in suburban life referred to by the Merrylands Council (see Chapter Three page 62), but the quality and depth of social capital available.

For Penny and Nick, the Sharehood was a way to model behaviour that they saw as congruent with their ideal versions of suburban life. In a sense, they were attempting not only to model change, but in doing so to contribute to the creation of new social norms, in the transfer from parent to child, neighbour to neighbour, they hope to shift understandings of 'normal' practice to something 'better'.

The results of a survey conducted by the Sharehood Collective in August 2012 indicate that while nearly all those signed up to the network love the *idea* of neighbourhood networks of sharing, very few actually engaged in the sharing of goods and services or attended social events promoted through the network (Kitchener, pers. com. 2012). Given the high hopes many participants placed on the Sharehood as a vehicle for societal transformation, it is not surprising that disappointment in the Sharehood was also expressed by some participants. For example, after a year of correspondence, Bea admitted to feeling "A bit miffed about good old Sharehood" (BeaSH:Let10). She had seen the results of the survey and observed that "Almost all survey responses said that they thought Sharehood was 'a really good idea' but they haven't really 'done' anything with the Sharehood nor have they leant or borrowed anything much. I can only agree" (BeaSH:Let10). Bea went on to express her frustration at the direction that the broader Sharehood (as opposed to her local network) was taking and its inability to contribute to the social revolution that she was longing for. She wrote:

I looked at the minutes of the agenda of Sharehood last meeting and it seems there is money going to stalls, postcards, advertising, a banner, a staff member, more money for business training was requested. But nothing seems to be 'really happening'. I read today that they have about \$9,000 in the budget. The idea of the Sharehood, at least the one I was sold, hasn't been made real, in my opinion. They are promoting the idea but not the means to make 'connections'. It is the case of 'everything in the window and nothing in the shop'... it is beginning to feel a bit like bureaucracy to me (BeaSH:Let10).

Bea felt that the focus of the Sharehood had become too much about the promotion of the 'brand' and less about the creation of on the ground change. This was particularly because she felt ill-supported by the Collective who had denied her request for a small amount of money to run a neighbourhood event, a rejection she didn't understand having seen the bottom line of the budget. From Bea's perspective, the Sharehood is failing to bring about a 'sharing society' and instead is concentrating its resources on the bigger 'brand' rather than 'sharing' them amongst members.

While Nick did not share Bea's concern that the Sharehood brand had become more important than sharing, he did express an awareness of the risks involved with increased branding. He explained:

I told one guy about the movies that I show in the park over summer by running an extension cord across the road. He loved it and insisted that I should call it 'Guerrilla Cinema' and promote it on community radio.

I appreciated his enthusiasm, but I don't want it to be impersonal. I want it to be for our neighbours and their friends (NickSH:Int1).

Both Bea and Nick demonstrate similar concerns about overuse of the sharing 'brand' similar to those of Sven Eberlein and Neal Gorenflo set out in Chapter One, that the term 'sharing' will become an overused and mostly useless marketing gimmick.

Ontological insecurity: connecting with people 'like me'

In contrast to the drive exhibited by Sharehood members to contribute to a larger political project, questions of ontological insecurity were the key driver for social connection amongst MPE residents. Gwyther (2003) argues that ontological security underpins people's desire to form and adhere to social norms and the desire to acquire the understanding necessary to belong and to thrive in any suburban community. 'Ontological security' is Anthony Giddens' term for the "confidence or trust that the natural world and social world are as they appear to be, involving the basic existential parameters of self and social identity" (1984, p.375). Such confidence and trust enables individuals to understand the importance of rules of belonging and codes of behaviour. In other words, ontological security provides an assurance that one's habitus is likely to match the field and that one has access to highly compatible cultural capital. I am going to draw on the concept of ontological security in the remainder of this chapter as the

desire for such a sense of homely belonging in the suburban context was clearly evident in interviews and letters with MPE participants.

For MPE residents Alice and Liz, sharing values and ideals with neighbours is important. Having grown up in Russia, Alice understood that she had a very different kind of childhood to most of her neighbours. At the same time, she reflected that a shared vision of the future was a key part of what she liked about living in an MPE. Alice assumed that this was indicative of shared ideals, values and social norms, regardless of past experience, explaining that she and her neighbours “Kind of share the, maybe the goals or the values of living in a peaceful and well organised community” (AliceMPE:Int1).

Liz had a similar perspective writing “It’s nice that my neighbours on either side appear to have similar values to me” (LizMPE:Let2). Liz valued these interactions that helped maintain a peaceful and non-threatening community. She wrote that she and her neighbours had

Discussed a few concerns about the [street] that we live in. [We were] concerned about a house that has a few cars frequenting it at bizarre times. [We] also noticed a car outside on watch. Although an odd conversation, it’s good to be aware of our surroundings (LizMPE:Let1).

Implied within Liz’s letter was her sense at the strangeness in discussing such local problems with her neighbours. At the same time, it was an interaction that she appreciated because it was an expression of a mutual wish: a desire to maintain a particular type of neighbourhood feel. For Alice and Liz, social connection with neighbours is not only important for maintain shared values, but that shared values help to maintain social connection.

Many popular discourses explain MPEs as a part of a process of ‘defensive urbanisation’ based on concerns about status and security (Gwyther 2004; Gleeson 2006a). In 2010 the journal *Urban Policy and Research* ran a special issue ‘Privatisation, Security and Community: How Master Planned Estates are Changing Suburban Australia’ in which such issues were specifically discussed. While processes of defensive urbanisation are clearly present in examples of Australian MPEs, McGuirk and Dowling argue that “many of the master-planned developments extant or emerging in Sydney [can be considered] lifestyle communities where status and security are less important drivers than a

broadly common identity forged around lifestyle preference and/or life-cycle stage” (2007, p.24). Such an assertion suggests that a sense of social solidarity, the sense of access to meaningful connections with others ‘like them’, motivates elements of suburban behaviour such as where to live. This is not to say that issues of status and security did not play into suburban experiences of MPE participants and these issues will be discussed further below.

That Tony actively sought a sense of ontological security, a sense of homely belonging to his neighbourhood and strong social connection with his neighbours, *in* an MPE was evident in his disappointment with his suburban experience. Tony and I were discussing his experiences of MPE living when he burst out with “[This estate] is a shithole. This is the most horrible place I have ever lived in my life!” When I questioned him further he explained: “There is no community! It’s a, it’s a group of houses in the same area... I think that all these people have been thrown into this new estate with nothing in common and there’s no... there’s nothing to give you something in common” (TonyMPE:Int1). Tony was particularly angry with what he saw as the failure of estate developers to provide the sense of community that they had promoted, exclaiming that the estate was “Purpose built for families and everything like that. That’s what this whole place is meant to be about!” (TonyMPE:Int1).

In buying within an estate, Tony thought that he was purchasing not only a property, but a ready built community of people who would be willing to socially connect with him and his family. For example by meeting in the park so that the kids could play together, or inviting each other over for barbeques (TonyMPE:Int1). Bosman (2012) argues that the development of MPEs has been driven by a desire for the type of life Tony was seeking – a community with strong connections and a return to the ideas of the rural idyll. She argues that “the perceived need for community relationships within MPCs (Master Planned Communities) was often the outcome of intensive and selective market research which suggested that many homebuyers were looking for ‘a way to put small-town neighbourliness back into their lives’” (2012, p.58). For Tony however, the expectation that the quality of relationships in his MPE would be high and that he would have easy access to social capital, failed to be realised in the context of his suburban experience.

The work of urban sociologist Gabrielle Gwyther offers insight into the value that MPE participants place on social connection. Gwyther (2003) writes that a shared

understanding of lifestyle is a key factor motivating people to move to new suburbs, explaining that estate developments provide residents with

a sense of coherent and social order and a degree of control over their physical and social environments; they offer a sense of active engagement, rules of belonging and a code of behaviour that provide an anchor for communal and consequently individual identity, and the feeling of predictability from which residents could plan their life (2003, p.17)

Indeed in discussions with participants about life in an MPE, many remarked on the predictable nature of life. Liz explained that this was because everyone was 'on par' financially and socially, Lauren explained in living in the outer suburbs she didn't expect to be 'surprised', while Scott thought life was likely to be predictable in his neighbourhood because there were 'less drug addicts' than there were in suburbs closer to the city.

Some research participants predicted the likely social behaviours of others based on where they lived. For example Liz, an MPE resident, assumed that those living within MPEs like hers would be likely to behave in what she considered a more respectful way than those who lived in the neighbouring suburbs. Liz explained that "I haven't really been to the parks and stuff like that. But [people have barbeques there] and you would hope that they'd actually clean up after themselves... That kind of stuff you would expect more in an estate like this, that people would respect that" (LizMPE:Int1). In making such an assumption, Liz highlights her expectations that those living in an estate would likely be those who behaved in accordance to her social norms of politeness; they would conform with norms of 'good citizenship' discussed in Chapter Five. Her comment is also supported by her statement that "It's not such a bad thing if people can't afford [to live here]... they can just be further on in the next suburb or something" (LizMPE:Int1). For Liz, the cost of housing in her estate acted to filter out those people who might be less likely to behave in ways that she considered appropriate. Indeed her decision to live in an MPE was in part guided by the assumption that those who could afford to live there, who would thus behave in a certain way, would create a field in which neighbourhood behaviours are likely to be predictable.

Of course, the filtering is never absolute. Despite her expectation of likely estate residents, Liz also provided many examples of instances where her presumptions proved

false. For example she explained that she was lucky enough to live in her house as the people before her had broken their rental contract because “They were just living beyond their means, from what we can understand. I think the debt collectors towed their car and stuff...” (LizMPE:Int1). While this seems to support Liz’s assumption that only those with money, and the ability to manage it, can live in the estate, it also indicates the actual diversity of residents; some residents did not fit Liz’s ideal. Liz’s assumptions were further challenged when she later wrote of her shock in discovering that a number of robberies had occurred in the estate, and that a resident had been raped walking home from the train station.

That participants want to locate themselves with people ‘like them’ can be understood in the context of world that is viewed as increasingly unstable and chaotic. Giddens argues that there exists a sense that “on the other side of what might appear to be quite a trivial aspect of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks. And this chaos is not just disorganisation, but the loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons” (1991, p.36). Notwithstanding the unsettling accounts of social misbehaviour, Liz maintained a firm belief in the types of people who lived in her estate – presumably with the assumption that such occurrences were less prevalent in her neighbourhood than the chaos that prevailed outside it.

Louise Johnson, in her paper *SOS – Sustaining our Suburbs* (2003) at the 2003 State of Australian Cities Conference, explains that one of the key theoretical and marketable elements of the MPE is the promotion of a specific type of community that can be bought, a community that people both desire, and hope to identify with. As Gwyther explains:

Developers’ promotional material proclaims: “Be a part of a community”; “This will encourage people to talk to one another and establish a community spirit”; “The quality of life at Glenmore Park promotes real community spirit, encouraging neighbours to get to know each other, to take time for a chat over the fence, or to catch up for a BBQ”; “Building community by working together”. This vision of community is place based, somewhat static, but with the *promise of social connectivity* and interpersonal ties that provide support, a sense of belonging and social identity (emphasis added 2004, p.57)

As a case in point, the marketing material for Kingsford estate in Victoria asks potential residents to “Imagine sun drenched days spent enjoying your natural surrounds with good friends and family. Kingsford is a community that has it all! It’s a return to the old-fashioned community values updated with a distinctly modern twist” (Kingsford 2013). Not only does estate advertising tap into this desire for greater social connectivity, but developers also seem to recognise the quest to recover those social norms of social connection so valued by participants, tapping into the broader narrative of suburban rest and retreat. Yet to use the words of Deyan Sudjic, for some like Tony “the idea of community as a desirable but abstract quality is much more powerful than its reality” (1992, p.283).

MPEs and the Sharehood as ontologically secure

The decision to participate in the Sharehood or reside in an MPE was driven, in part, by a desire for social connection with people ‘like me’ and the sense of security and homeliness that comes with such connection (Sharehood: Kristin, Nick, Bea, Penny; MPEs: Liz, Scott, Tony, Maria, Mike, Kylie). Both MPEs and the Sharehood offer ways of facilitating social connection by providing a geographical bounding. For the MPEs this is done by estate perimeters, often marked with decorative walls, landscape features, naming and marketing. Similarly, the geographical bounding of the Sharehood is established by only allowing participants’ access to other suburban residents within a 400m radius. In both instances, the MPEs and Sharehood, local neighbourhood interaction is privileged.

Both MPEs and the Sharehood can be understood as responses to structural forces, such as neoliberalism and capitalism, that are perceived to be threatening existing or historical forms of social connection. Sharehood members did not express their desire for social connection as being a response to a sense of ontological insecurity, yet the Sharehood as a way of displaying connection with people ‘like me’ cannot be discounted. When Sharehood members expressed their desire to connect with their neighbours as a part of a broader political project, they also expressed their desire to be a part of a community of shared ideals and values. For example as Nick wrote,

One of my favourite moments last week was an afternoon whinge session about the dismal election with my neighbour. She’s a sprightly 70-something... it was lovely to feel that common sentiment even

though we are two generations (well one and a half) apart
(NickSH:Let1).

Shared common sentiment is an indication of shared common values and opinions on public issues. This rests on some local homogeneity within the neighbourhood population, and the Sharehood assists in the facilitation of such realisations of shared values.

A number of authors suggest that MPEs tend to foster homogenous social groupings (Gleeson 2006a; Gwyther 2008; McGuirk & Dowling 2007). I argue that social stratification, hierarchy and inequality are recurrent features of human history and desire for social-filtering is not a contemporary idea, thus the Sharehood itself may result in social homogeneity. Indeed, in 1838 readers of the *Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* were encouraged “to choose a neighbourhood where the houses and inhabitants are all, or chiefly, of the same description and class as the house we intend to inhabit, and as ourselves” (cited in G. Davison 1995, p.45). While MPEs offer the opportunity for individuals to geographically situate themselves within a field of similar people, the Sharehood does the same thing, despite being less explicitly geographically located, by providing a simple tool for discerning a community of likeminded people. In a sense, participants from both groups reside in an MPE or participate in the Sharehood as a conscious decision to *share*, ideals, values, lifestyles, with others.

Writing about MPEs, McGuirk and Dowling argue that “many of the master-planned developments extant or emerging in Sydney [can be considered] lifestyle communities where status and security are less important drivers than a broadly common identity forged around lifestyle preference and/or life-cycle stage” (2007, p.24). Such an assertion suggests that a sense of social solidarity, the sense of access to meaningful connections with others ‘like them’, motivates elements of suburban behaviour such as where to live. Similarly, participation in the Sharehood may signal to others that a person is interested in engaging with their local community and/or reducing resource consumption, thus it is a tool for gathering like-minded people together. The result is a network of geographically proximate people who share similar values and aspirations. In essence, the Sharehood serves as a unifying point, a group for which people can be in or out of, for suburban residents in much the same way as the MPEs.

Maintaining distance

Neighbours should be there for one another... that's when good neighbours become good friends (Theme song, Australian television drama *Neighbours*).

The *Neighbours* theme song suggests that becoming good friends with your neighbours is desirable. Thus far in this chapter I have explained that participants from the Sharehood and MPEs value socially connecting with neighbours. They both do so for personal reasons related to belonging and security and the sense that they are able to access a pool of social capital. At the same time, Sharehood participants seek to promote social connection as a way of advancing a political project of broad social and environmental change, the promotion of the 'sharing society'. In contrast, MPE participants were more strongly motivated to connect as a result of underlying issues of ontological insecurity. As a result of this insecurity, the MPE desire for connection exists in tension with a wariness of becoming *too* close and the risk of being 'discovered' as someone who does not belong.

In contrast to the desire for a place of retreat with people 'like me', some MPE participants were concerned, through increased social interaction, that neighbours might discover that they were in fact 'not like them'. Maria and Liz were particularly wary of engaging too much with their neighbours for fear of being judged: the more interactions they had, and the more shared during an interaction, the greater the potential for their weaknesses to be revealed. Liz alluded to this fear when she commented that "I guess we all secretly wish for an element of friendliness like Ramsay Street on *Neighbours*", followed by the qualification "Not the sticky-beaking⁶ though" (LizMPE:Let5). Of course Liz's comments about her neighbours rudeness in not acknowledging her (see page 125) indicate that fear of being judged can co-exist with judgement of others.

The comments of Maria and Liz echo those of a participant in Lyn Richards' 1990 study *Nobody's Home: dreams and realities in a new suburb*. Answering a question, one of Richards' participants explained that a good neighbour is "someone you can trust. People that are good people. I think, that's what you're after. Not sticky-beaks or

⁶ A 'sticky beak' is an Australian colloquialism meaning "a person who sticks his or her nose (beak) into others' affairs" (B. Moore 2009, p.1402).

anything like that" (Richards 1990, p.220). Such wariness about becoming too close, or being too much in the eye of neighbours is a common theme in other neighbouring literature as will be discussed below.

Several MPE residents (Maria, Alice, Liz) were concerned about the possibility of being judged if they were to develop social connections with neighbours further. Maria disliked feeling that the other women of her neighbourhood wanted to know details about each other's lives in order to cast judgement. She related a conversation she'd observed with some women in the park:

[One woman] said 'We bought another car', and [the other woman] made such a face like 'Wow congratulations' and it was 'When did you buy another car?' 'How come I wasn't informed?' you know a little bit... I can't talk to people like that (MariaMPE:Int1).

Maria resented feeling that people in her neighbourhood judged each other by details of their lives, such as whether or not they had a new car. In her comments she reveals her wariness of the types of details about her life that she would have to divulge if she was to interact intimately with people in her neighbourhood. While not uncommon for neighbours to take an interest in each other's lives, indeed Gleeson reflecting on his own experiences reported that "neighbours took a keen interest in what you did, how you kept yourself" (2008b, p.40), for some the extent of this interest went too far. Lyn Richards found a similar concern in the responses of some of the women she interviewed about their suburban experiences in the late-1970s and early-1980s. As one woman in her study explained, "There is a lot of competition in the Court, you know, about what have I got and you haven't" (Richards 1994, p.258). This comment was explained as being a result of borrowing practices in which women tried to outdo each other with what they had to offer. Such an insight has implications for making sense of concepts and practices, and the issues of belonging and ontological security, of sharing in the contemporary suburban context and will be discussed in some detail in Chapter Seven.

The risk of judgement inherent in social connection with neighbours was a common theme emerging from interviews and letters with MPE participants. Liz spent some time reflecting on this and wrote to me several times about her regular trips to the small rural town of Clareville. In Clareville Liz helped her friend in the pub and experienced firsthand the ins and outs of a tight-knit local community. In our initial conversation Liz

explained how she appreciated being known by everyone in Clareville and liked that kind of ‘country town feel’. This sentiment changed as she continued to work behind the bar. She wrote, “Upon reflecting on your letter and experiencing a bit of time with the locals, I realise that sometimes being at the same venue, where everyone knows you, isn’t always appealing. Everyone knows everyone’s business” (LizMPE:Let1). Liz found this public intimacy confronting when it became *her* business that people knew about. So much so that some months later she wrote, “I’ve just spent Easter once again in [Clareville]. Once again everyone knows people’s business – I am surprised that even I know info on them! Even more surprising was that some people I thought I [had met only once] had dirt on me!!” (LizMPE:Let3). Liz found herself partly woven into the community and indeed had eagerly anticipated such a time, when she talked about ‘the country feel’. Yet implied within the use of the word ‘dirt’, is her discomfort with being ‘known about’ and judged.

Over the course of our correspondence Liz also wrote about two rowdy incidents (briefly recounted in Chapter Five). The first event she described was a fight that occurred in the front yard of her neighbour’s house one night at a party. Liz wrote:

My neighbours were so embarrassed, I probably would have been too. It was quite bad, [the fight] went on/off for over an hour. Swearing, blood and glass everywhere. I reassured my neighbours that it was beyond their control and I even helped clean their house and get first aid stuff (from my house)... Didn’t want it to be awkward... (LizMPE:Let1).

Although she was unable to articulate the source, it is obvious that Liz noted the discomfort of her neighbours and the potential that such discomfort had to change the relationships she had with them when they next saw each other.

Some months later Liz wrote of a second incident in her street where another party got slightly out of hand. This time it was her turn to be embarrassed and for the same neighbours to reassure her. The party at Liz’s house was wild and led to a couple of guests yelling at each other in the front yard. Liz wrote:

It was in the driveway. My... neighbours (who we’re good friends with) told me about it later that week. They were probably happy as they’d had a similar (but worse) issue [on] Christmas night and they were

embarrassed ([it was] their guest) so it kind of evened out
(LizMPE:Let4).

Liz considered that any discomfit neighbours may have felt as a result of the argument outside their house was erased now that she too had had to deal with a similar event. It seems that neighbourhood relations, like any other kind of social relation, can be strengthened by shared experiences, especially if those experiences involve some of kind transgression of norms. In this way, those who transgressed can form bonds as a result of being 'the other' together (Pollack 2005). Thus it is through our flaws and subsequent displays of vulnerability, as well as our strengths, that strong social connections can be made and social capital further developed.

For MPE residents, being seen to adhere to the same social norms as your neighbour is important. A conversation I had with Lauren helps to shed light on why Liz was initially concerned with how the first problematic party might impact on her relations with neighbours and why the second incident contributed to a positive deepening of the relationship. Having recently moved from an inner city suburb to outer suburban Melbourne, Lauren claimed to have experienced a kind of culture shock. She wrote of how she perceived people's desire to remain distant from their neighbours, while presenting the image of a controlled, orderly and well maintained life:

It doesn't seem real, these people feel like they're robots or something
'cause there is this yeah... polite, everyone going about their business.
The kids aren't too naughty, you don't usually see kids screaming and
having tantrums. Quite unusual. It's a bit bizarre at times, it does seem
a bit robotic (LaurenMPE:Int1).

Such a comment brings to mind the 1972 film *The Stepford Wives* in which the women of Stepford are transformed into robots who give the appearance of domestic perfection. It is perhaps this desire to *appear* to be in control, and to conform to social expectations of appropriate behaviour, that leads to embarrassment when realities of imperfection are revealed (as in Liz's example above). Participants like Liz, Maria and Alice, demonstrated their reticence to talk to neighbours in situations that might lead to their being judged. As explained in Chapter Five, in some situations the uncertainty around the nuances of social norms and the appropriateness of certain behaviours in certain contexts contributed to this sense of discomfort and the increased risk of embarrassment.

Retreating to the home

In Chapter Three I explained how Australian suburban life has been expressed and experienced over time as a place of and for retreat. Retreat is historically understood to be a retreat from the busyness of work and the chaos of the city to the calm and caring field of the suburban neighbourhood. Emerging strongly from the interviews and letters with MPE participants was the theme of retreat *from* the neighbourhood into the home and the tension that such a desire for retreat engendered (Alice, Liz, Mel, Kylie, Mike). Retreat *to* the private home was not explicitly considered in Chapter Three, although the theme is picked up in some scholarly literature, such as Allon's *Renovation Nation: Our obsession with the home* (2008).

For Alice, her desire to retreat *into* the home caused her some consternation as it seemed to compete with her want for greater social connection and her need to conform with what she saw as the social norms of neighbourly interaction. The significance of this tension was revealed after Alice told me she wished she knew her neighbours better while also maintaining the current distance she had from them, and I then explained how many other participants shared her feelings: "It's interesting that people have two desires – 'I'd really like a stronger community but at the same time I like being private and coming home and not talking to anyone". The relief in Alice's response was palpable when she exclaimed, "So it's not us only [who feel so torn]!" (AliceMPE:Int1), revealing a fear that the tension she and her husband felt about desiring both neighbourly interaction and privacy was abnormal. In part this sense of guilt must stem from the power of social norms of polite neighbourly interaction as discussed in Chapter Five. To ignore a neighbour is to go against what it means to be a good suburban citizen in an MPE.

Mike and Kylie, while also wanting to connect more with their neighbours, similarly expressed a keen desire to keep the various parts of their lives separate. Mike told me about the proposed Residents' Centre in his estate that would house a gymnasium, swimming pool, café and children's play area and would be available exclusively to estate residents. He explained that while in the original marketing material circulated by the Developer the Centre was going to be in a separate and private building, the current proposal was for it to be much smaller and attached to the shopping complex. Mike expressed his dislike of this explaining that "I don't want to go and swim and then somebody parks their car next to the shopping centre; it's like 'Hi, [but] I'm here for a

swim, [not a chat]” (MikeMPE:Int1). Mike’s comments here reveal that he doesn’t want his social interactions with others in his neighbourhood to be unexpected. Yet at the same time, in an earlier comment he had expressed his surprise that in Australia, as compared to South Africa where he had lived until recently, if you want to socialise with neighbours “You practically have to make an appointment” (MikeMPE:Int1).

Lucinda Holdforth’s description of the tension between a desire for privacy and a desire to develop meaningful relationships of social exchange captures beautifully the essence of the tensions described by many MPE participants. Holdforth writes:

Living in the noisy hubbub of the city, each one of us wants to protect our privacy, especially at home. Me too. I consider myself something of an urban hermit. I don’t want to be friends with people purely because we live in close proximity. On the other hand, it’s rather strange to pretend you have no knowledge of someone who lives across the hall [or across the street] (2007, p.17).

The practice of retreating from the neighbourhood, and constantly limiting one’s interactions with neighbours, was not always mutually appreciated. Being ignored by a neighbour was not uncommon in Lauren’s experience. Lauren expressed her frustration that some of her neighbours were unwilling to acknowledge her or her husband, explaining “[A neighbour] goes out of his way to avoid contact on the drive when we pull our cars up at similar times. Well, it seems as if he avoids it! [My partner] has the same impression as me” (LaurenMPE:Int1). Similarly Liz was disappointed by her neighbours saying “My neighbour across the road always drives into the garage and into the house – [I] only see her occasionally if she’s going for a run but she’s such a snob, she *never* looks up to say hello, she’ll put her head down instead” (LizMPE:Let3). In Liz’s case, this lack of acknowledgement goes against her understanding of the social norms of estate life as expressed in Chapter Five; the importance of acknowledging neighbours and politely saying hello.

Some participants (Alice, Mel, Bea) revealed how the social norms of ‘keeping to oneself’ and respecting privacy shaped their attitudes towards neighbourly interactions. For example when I asked Alice whether she would ever knock on a neighbour’s door to ask for something she replied “Not if I can help it, I feel like I am intruding” (AliceMPE:Int1). Mel also captured this feeling when she said “I’m not... one that wants people, you know, just coming into my house all the time. I like to get home and know

that there is a bit of distance there as well, so we don't live in each other's pockets or anything" (MelMPE:Int1). This desire for a friendly distance is prominent in many studies on neighbouring. Indeed, the quotes from research participants are startlingly similar to those of participants in other studies. For example one person in Richards' study explained that a good neighbour 'doesn't live in your pocket' (1990, p.221). A decade on and a participant in Crow et al's study is quoted as saying almost the same thing: good neighbouring is "not being constantly in each other's pockets, but being available, being there if needed" (Crow et al 2002, p.136). This need to be friendly, but not too friendly is a common theme in neighbouring studies.

Bea was the only Sharehood member to articulate her need for privacy as a retreat *from* her neighbours. She explained her dream of living in an interdependent eco-community, yet emphasised just how important her own privacy was. She said, "I want a shack. One room, combustion stove, eco-dunny. I want my own little wall around my place, 'cause sometimes I've gotta close my door, my red flag is out, don't knock on my door" (BeaSH:Int1).

There is an international body of literature of neighbouring that recognises the existence of a tension between proximity and privacy as an inherent part of what it means to be a neighbour (Crow et al. 2002; van Eijk 2012; Stokoe & Wallwork 2003; Sudjic 1992). Similar findings are present in Australian scholarly work. For example Mark Peel argues that stories of the desire for suburban community and connection go together with common understandings that practices of 'good neighbouring' involve maintaining distance. He writes:

Good neighbours maintain their distance; they don't intrude, and they don't allow noises or smells or children to invade other people's homes. Good neighbours see what they are meant to see and know what they are intended to know (2000, p.277)

Blunt and Dowling (2006) similarly assert that a tension between public and private life is an inherent part of what constitutes home in an Australian suburban context. Recognising the prevalence of such tensions between connection and distance is important in understanding the various factors that may shape concepts and practices of sharing in the suburban context. To be taken from this is perhaps the lesson that more nuanced understanding of suburban interaction, more nuanced stories of what it

means to thrive in a neighbourhood, are needed in order to manage such tension that is obviously causing discomfort.

Busy lives

For some MPE residents, retreat to the private home was driven by the busy nature of their lives, which impact on opportunities and willingness for social connection with neighbours (Mel, Alice, Liz, Tony). For example while Mel said hello to her neighbours when they passed in the street and occasionally shared barbeques or children's hand-me-down clothing, she was wary about the time costs of interaction. When I asked Mel whether she would like more or less distance from her neighbours she replied that her current situation was ideal because "You don't feel obligated to go and interact or, we don't have one of those neighbours that you know wants to engage you for an hour because they've got the time" (MelMPE:Int1). She then went on to say,

You know you're so time poor... I don't have hours to talk about the grass, or (laughs) that sort of thing, so [although I'll be polite] I'm really willing to cut the conversation and [say] 'Great, have a good night, gotta get inside, feed the family', and put a stop to it and get inside (MelMPE:Int1).

Alice also valued the social distance she was able to keep from her neighbours, although she didn't know them as well as Mel knew hers. When I asked her whether she would like more or less distance she replied:

We probably wouldn't want to have our house open at all times to just everybody... people we don't know... well [we] would not like them just dropping by because we would have to kind of... ahh... stop whatever we want and, you know, pretend to be nice and I guess we're getting quite busy now (AliceMPE:Int1).

While Liz did not find it problematic in the way that Mel and Alice did, she also noted the amount of time that conversing with neighbours could take, and how this could seem like an imposition, saying "I'd get stuck in the driveway with [my neighbour] for like an hour, but it was nice to know that the people next door you can chat to" (LizMPE:Int1).

The busy lives of MPE residents in this study are consistent with other research on suburban estate life. According to Williams and Pocock (2009) many people living in the Australian suburbs are commuting two and half hours each day, leaving home at 6.30

am and not arriving back again until 7.30 or 8.00 pm. Williams and Pocock also found that time is valued as a significant and scarce resource as people try to manage competing demands of home, work and community life. One participant in their study revealed, “I’ve scheduled my whole week. Every part of the week from when I wake up to when I go back to bed is scheduled” (2009, p.55). For someone arriving home from work with three children to feed, a dog to walk and the ironing to do, the possibility of an hour long conversation with a neighbour about the daisies on the lawn threatens to disturb the delicate temporal equilibrium of daily life. The pressure of time felt by many MPE residents meant that the home was viewed increasingly not only as a place of retreat, but as a place in which demands on time were prioritised.

Tony linked the increased busyness of suburban life with what he saw as a decline in neighbourly connection saying:

I think [the lack of engagement] is to do with [the fact] that this is a modern estate in a modern area and even though people are doing the same old jobs umm, if you don’t work locally you’re buggered, ‘cause you’ve got to leave at 6.30 get home at 7. And you don’t want to talk to anybody (TonyMPE:Int1).

Tony picks up on both structural problems: the long commute and that busy lives reduce the desire for, and indeed leave little time or energy for, neighbourly interactions. Yet perhaps it is not just busyness, but the increased mobility of people that contributes to such disconnect with neighbours (Crow et al., 2002; Sennett, 1998).

While no Sharehood members explicitly or implicitly made reference to personally being time poor, Nick did consider that limitations on time was having an impact on Australian society more generally. Nick linked his sense of loss of community and social connection to his recent hitchhiking experiences and what he saw as an increasing lack of trust of others. He wrote:

I suppose things like the changing nature of families and both parents working away from home, long working hours, long commutes, increasing in-home entertainment options, pervasive negative media reporting about crime and unsavoury types, 24/7 shopping, the dominance of chain stores over local stores, increasing family mobility. All these things affect the way people interact with neighbours and

strangers, and invariably have led to greater isolation and mistrust (NickSH:Let5).

That Sharehood members did not allude to time constraints does not necessarily mean that they were not busy, rather that many of them had chosen to live life in a way that prioritised community interaction. For example one participant explained how he was slowly selling off inherited family paintings in order to fund a lifestyle of community activism, giving him the time for investing in personal relationships in his neighbourhood and broader suburban community.

The implications of ‘close yet distant’ for sharing

In this chapter I asked, ‘what are the underlying values that motivate attitudes and practices of neighbourly sharing?’ Both MPEs and Sharehood members shared similar values and ideals regarding their desires for increased social connection with their neighbours. Both groups sought connection for their own sense of wellbeing, but were also motivated by other factors that existed within the broader social context. For Sharehood members this was in part driven by a desire to contribute to a broader political project of suburban social and environmental sustainability. In contrast, MPE members desired connection as a way of attending to an increasing sense of ontological insecurity, and the need for reassurance and affirmation of belonging and identity. Yet despite the different motivating factors, desire for connection and the shared belief that neighbours *should* connection, was common to both groups.

In Chapter Five I argued that uncertainty about the social norms of engagement with neighbours means, in some cases, people are wary of neighbourly connection for fear of transgressing social norms. In this chapter I have argued that yet another dynamic element is present, for MPE participants, in the ongoing negotiating of neighbourly relationships – the internal tensions between desiring closeness and being wary of what too much closeness will do for their perceived ability to conform to norms. This tension has potentially significant implications for understanding and inhabiting suburban fields and how sharing, as an act requiring interaction, is conceived and practised.

A number of scholars address the complexity of neighbouring relationships and the tension that arises between the desire to be friendly with neighbours and the desire to retain the privacy of the home. Willmott (1986) argues that as a result of the ambiguities of neighbouring relationships “people lay emphasis on the need for privacy and reserve,

alongside the general disposition towards friendliness (Crow et al., 2002; Willmott 1986, p.55). The experiences of participants in negotiating these tensions bring to the fore the complexities of the suburban narratives discussed in Chapter Three. For example, the desire to retreat from neighbours is to challenge the norms of good citizenship and polite interaction. At times the result of this is a kind of cognitive dissonance for people who at once want to be good citizens and connect with neighbours *and* be allowed to privately retreat. Indeed to privately retreat and not draw undue attention to oneself is also an act of good neighbourliness according to the discussion on page 79. In the following chapter I draw on the findings of Chapters Five and Six to make sense of, and interpret, participant accounts of concepts and practices of sharing.

Chapter 7

All give and no take?



7: All give and no take?

For to the bee a flower is a fountain of life. And to the flower a bee is a messenger of love. And to both, bee and flower, the giving and the receiving is a need and an ecstasy (Kahlil Gibran 1883-1931).

Internalised as a part of a set of dispositions and skills learnt through cultural discourses and practices, the social norms and values expressed by participants in Chapters Five and Six, together with the broader cultural narratives described in Chapter Three, become a part of a *habitus* of suburban life. *Habitus* does not provide strict rules by which to live, but rather provides a capacity to interpret, contextualise and give expression to these norms in the specific details of everyday life. In Chapter Five I argued that participants are aware of social norms of neighbourly interaction and generally acknowledge the importance of adhering to such norms. For MPE participant's adherence to norms is often directly related to the concept of what it means to be a good and self-sufficient Australian citizen. Both groups have techniques for managing instances of discomfort that occur when norms are transgressed. In Chapter Six, I argued that participants from both groups strongly desire social connection with their neighbours. For the Sharehood this is driven by the desire to contribute to the broader political project of suburban sustainability, while for MPE member's connection is related to issues of ontological insecurity. Yet despite the differences in expression, the desire for connection is strong in both groups. MPE members also expressed concern about the implications of too much connection for suburban privacy. In this chapter I pull together the findings thus far to provide an important context for analysis of data as I seek to understand how participants conceptualise and practise sharing in their complex suburban field.

Defining sharing

In Chapter One I explained the confusion present in popular and scholarly conceptualisations of sharing. A parallel elasticity of language was also present in the interviews and letters with participants from the Sharehood and MPEs, creating similar linguistic confusion. The extent of this confusion and the implications of it for analysis emerged through the process of reflexive journaling and initial analysis and development of orienting concepts. The elasticity of language was present in all of the data: For example, while explicitly talking about sharing Nick (Sharehood) wrote of how

he 'lent' his car to his friends, Penny (Sharehood) talked about 'borrowing' an onion from her neighbours, and Liz (MPE) spoke about 'giving' her neighbours wine in 'exchange' for the use of their party lights. Liz points out the slippery way that language is used: "How often do people ask to 'borrow' a tissue from you? Every time someone says that to me I tell them 'No you can't 'borrow' it, you can have it' and they think about it and they laugh" (LizMPE:Let5). That this slipperiness was present in our discussions of sharing is not necessarily problematic, revealing as it does a real richness and possibility for the concept of sharing. It does however have implications for analysis and points to the need for in-depth examination of practice.

Interviews and letters with participants that dealt directly with the concept of sharing revolved around questions such as 'Would you ever ask your neighbour for an onion?' or 'Would you lend your neighbour a ladder?' These conversations took place within an ill-defined, but commonly held, understanding of sharing as some kind of exchange of goods and services between neighbours. As the research evolved and the significance of the subtleties of language emerged during initial analysis, I asked participants to explain the difference between the terms of sharing, lending, borrowing, exchanging, swapping etc. I asked this question of participants *after* I had interviewed all Sharehood members and some MPE residents. As such it was posed to two MPEs participants during interviews and all Sharehood and MPEs participants in the written correspondence. Four MPE residents and two Sharehood members responded to the questions.

Lauren and Liz, two MPE participants, responded with fairly similar definitions of sharing as a non-reciprocal behaviour. As Lauren explained: "I see sharing as not expecting that item (or feeling) to be returned. For example, I shared my banana bread with [my partner] today. I didn't expect to have the section returned to me" (LaurenMPE:Let3). Liz also wrote "If something is shared then that usually means items are for each other to keep" (LizMPE:Let5). Nick from the Sharehood had a similar response, although his definition also included the possibility for reciprocity. He wrote: "[Sharing] can include reciprocity but it doesn't require it in every case" (NickSH:Let8). These participant definitions mirrored the similar ambiguity between reciprocal and non-reciprocal exchange present in the scholarly literature in Chapter One. In addition however, Nick also wrote "In some ways, I think of [sharing] as a kind of attitude, an openness and willingness to help and be helped and to work together" (NickSH:Let8). As this chapter

develops, the concept of sharing as a kind of quality of relationship is something that begins to emerge strongly from the data.

Participants from both groups, as actors within the suburban field, also understand sharing in ways less explicit and more embodied than these consciously articulated definitions. Habitus, the embodied capacity to engage in social practice, means that understandings of sharing are not necessarily easily articulated. Thus the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the investigation of how sharing is conceptualised and practised as revealed through stories, experiences, accounts and values of suburban life as expressed by participants and interpreted in light of the social norms and cultural capital described in previous chapters. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections; sharing as conceptualised as generous and the practical implications of this; the possibilities inherent in the idea that to give can also be to receive; and the idea of sharing as an inherently pro-social behaviour.

Sharing as generous

Remember that there is no happiness in having or in getting, but only in giving. Reach out. Share. Smile. Hug. Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself (Og Mandino 1923-1996).

Sharing as an act of generosity was one of the strongest themes to emerge from interviews and written correspondence with participants from the Sharehood and MPEs. Sharing is understood as an act of generosity and an act of giving, that is, as a practice that selflessly benefits an individual or the community. For example Penny, a Sharehood member, explained, “The amount of tools and stuff that’s in our shed... that would be great if someone else is actually able to use it” (PennySH:Int1). While Scott, MPE resident said, “I’ve got more tools than most people... so I’ve always got people coming in [saying] ‘Scott can I borrow whatever’” (ScottMPE:Int1). Both Penny and Scott embraced sharing as an opportunity to explicitly affirm their willingness to give to neighbours and to implicitly affirm the extent of their private possessions. I asked both participants about their attitudes towards borrowing *from* neighbours. While Penny explained how she felt she might benefit, Scott exclaimed proudly, “I don’t have to!” (ScottMPE:Int1).

Generous sharing was also recognised as being about more than simple material possession. In Chapter Six I described how participants appreciated sharing values with their neighbours. Participants from the MPEs (Mel, Tony) also explained how they were able to share *knowledge* – knowledge that was both formally articulated (Mel once trained as a hairdresser) and tacitly held (Tony knew how to talk to suburban mechanics).

Australian born Tony is married to a Russian woman and knows, through his wife's experiences, just how cultural background can affect opportunities for work in the Australian context. Tony explained how he shared what he perceived to be his good understanding of his suburban field and his ability to 'work it', by recounting the story of his carpet cleaner Joe. Joe is an Indian man who was temporarily working as a cleaner until he could find a job that he wanted to develop into a career. Tony realised this and explained to me how he was able to help:

I said to [Joe], 'You know you won't be doing this forever' and [Joe says] 'I really want to be a mechanic'. So we took him to my mechanic... and I said 'Give him a job... he's my brother in law!' Or... whatever, this job in the local paper, I ring up and go 'One of my friends has got these skills, can we rock on down?' and I'd go down and I'd introduce [Joe] and I'd stand there so they don't be racist or anything bad (TonyMPE:Int1).

Tony was offering not only his time, but his social status and understanding of the suburban context and his informally held knowledge about how to talk to mechanics.

Born and bred in Australia, Tony has access to cultural understandings that Joe, a recent arrival from India, couldn't possibly have. Tony has a network of existing relationships, such as with his mechanic, built through ongoing engagement with the field. This enables him to know what will and won't be considered in a job application and how to ensure that Joe gets a fair interview based on his skills rather than his cultural background. In this, Tony has an understanding of the specific norms and protocols, relevant to his suburban context, that help him not only to gain access to networks of relationships but to thrive within them. Tony's intimate and embodied experience, his habitus that informs his ability to navigate his suburban context, puts him at a distinct advantage. Compared to Joe, Tony was rich in cultural capital and able to provide Joe with access to it via proxy.

While Joe would surely thrive in various Indian contexts, as a result of specific habitus, Tony recognises that elements of Australian field might be challenging for him. As a result of his own habitus and cultural capital, Tony is likely to inherently understand the appropriate body language to use when seeking a job, the social norms of dress and written and verbal communication. Tony is thus able to turn his explicitly and implicitly held knowledge of elements of Australian suburban life into valuable capital; capital he is then able to offer and to give, to others; a capital that directly and materially benefits Joe. Of course, this is not to reduce the importance of issues of race, employment and multiculturalism (for discussions of this see for example, Wise 2005; Turner 2008), rather that Tony's story shows that not only were material possessions able to be generously shared, but that cultural capital was also something that could be 'given'.

Sharing as a generous act to the community at large, rather than specific individuals, was another way that participants from both groups conceptualised their sharing practices. For Sharehood members this is congruent with their desires, as discussed in Chapter Five, to contribute towards the broader political project of the sharing society and suburban sustainability (Nick, Bea, Katrina, Penny, James). Similarly the value MPE residents placed on contributing generously to the common good is tied to social norms of good citizenship and contribution to the nation (Scott, Nancy, Tony).

MPE resident Scott gave a particularly clear example of how he felt he personally gave generously to his neighbourhood by providing first aid assistance and an informal security service. Scott works from his home office and often works during the day and late at night. Given that the office faces the street and a park with a basketball hoop, Scott provides a watchful eye; as he said "We're, [my wife and I], sort of like first aid emergency for anyone that injures themselves in the park" (ScottMPE:Int1). He also explained that he "Tried to keep things clean" for the neighbours by asking teenagers to stop playing basketball too late into the night because the noise could be heard across the estate. Scott considered this act to be a community service and the pride in his voice was palpable; like other participants, he valued immensely the opportunity to give generously.

Private ownership and generous sharing

The importance of social norms of ownership, as discussed in previous chapters, is an important pre-requisite for enabling participants such as Penny, Scott and Tony, to share their possessions and knowledge generously. The acts of giving recounted by these

participants are only possible in a context in which private and individual ownership and autonomy is valued and considered to be normal. For example, the generosity implied in the offer to lend tools would not be possible if the tools were communally owned. This reflects the broad factors shaping participant habitus in which private ownership is an inherently assumed part of how the social world is understood. Elements of this were revealed in the suburban narratives described in Chapter Three and again in the themes from MPE participants in Chapter Five and Six.

Only one participant extended the idea of sharing to that of shared ownership. When I asked Mike to explain what sharing meant he wrote:

Sharing means to me to share things in the community that everybody can use. For instance the 'community garden' where people might be able to contribute towards a common place where garden equipment is getting stored and everyone who participates in this project can share the equipment (MikeMPE:Let1).

Embedded in Mike's comment is an understanding that participants in a community garden would all contribute financially or materially and in return have equal access to space and tools. In such a situation there is no person who can be identified primarily as the 'giver' and thus the opportunity for generous sharing is somewhat reduced. While Mike was speaking hypothetically, he was the only participant from either the Sharehood or MPEs to consider common ownership in discussions about sharing. All other participants spoke about sharing from the assumed position of private ownership.

Easy to give, hard to take

That participants from the Sharehood and MPEs emphasised the generous nature of sharing as an act of giving, has implications for their attitudes towards receiving. As previously argued, participants inhabit suburban worlds within which self-sufficiency and independence is highly valued. While the importance of self-sufficiency was very clear in discussions with MPE residents (Chapter Five), that Sharehood members also valued independence was revealed, albeit more subtly, through the analysis of practices of sharing and this will be apparent below. Significant here is the increasingly similar positions of both MPE residents and Sharehood members in regards to suburban practices of sharing and neighbourhood engagement. As a result, one of the major themes emerging from the research data was that participants from the Sharehood and MPEs were uncomfortable asking their neighbours to share things with them. For

example, when I asked MPE resident Alice whether she would ever borrow anything from her neighbours she replied, “If I needed something urgently, maybe” (AliceMPE:Int1). When I asked her what sort of thing she acknowledged how uncomfortable she was about asking saying “I don’t know [what I would ask for], I have no idea. I hope that the suggestion would not actually happen” (AliceMPE:Int1). Nancy, also from an MPE, similarly expressed discomfort at the thought of asking her neighbours for favours and used the example of childcare to explain, “You don’t really want to give two more kids to someone who’s already got kids” (NancyMPE:Int). Nancy’s example indicates that to ask such a favour would be to burden and to be a ‘leaner’ rather than a ‘lifter’.

Sharehood members expressed a similar discomfort at the thought of asking their neighbours to share (where sharing meant receiving rather than giving). A part of the problem with receiving or taking from others is that, as Bea explained, “To me it’s asking favours. Favours that I’m simply not comfortable... it’s not part of my makeup. I’m simply not comfortable with it” (BeaSH:Int1). Penny also revealed how challenging she found asking her neighbours for dinner ingredients saying that she needed ‘support’ to do this. When I asked her to explain what she meant, she said, “Just using the onion example, if [my husband] said ‘Oh look, we haven’t got time to go to the shop, can we go next door and get an onion?’ I’d say, ‘Can you come with me!’ You know, a problem shared is a problem halved (laughs)” (PennySH:Int1). For Penny, while the item asked for might be common and cheap, the actual asking of the favour was relatively fraught.

Nick, a Sharehood member, also acknowledged the difficulties he had in asking and receiving favours. He explained how this may have been in part because of his cultural understandings of the valourising of giving and the backgrounding of receiving. Nick drew on his experience of several months hitchhiking around Australia to explain how he often felt uncomfortable receiving:

Later in the trip as I continued to receive people’s hospitality I became more comfortable accepting kindness without feeling I owed anything in return. There is something important in that lesson... In some ways it is harder to receive with an open heart than to give with an open heart. I think receiving can often seem like submission – though I don’t believe it is (NickSH:Let5).

Nick's hitchhiking experience may have provided him with a lesson in new ways of practising giving and receiving, a new element of his habitus, and he may have taken this learning back to his suburban field. On the other hand, his ability to freely receive from strangers may only have been possible because he was receiving from people he would likely never see again. These relationships formed while travelling, contrasted with the more static social make-up of the suburban neighbourhood in which neighbours are not chosen (Van Eijk 2012).

The strength with which participants from both groups expressed their discomfort in taking from their neighbours indicates that to ask for something is to transgress the social norm of independence and self-sufficiency. For Penny, that she found it so difficult to ask her neighbours for an onion seems at odds with her previous statements that popping in and out of each other's houses is how neighbourhood "life should be lived" (PennySH:Int1). Penny's difficulties resolving her ideals of neighbourly relations with her own practice (going to the shops rather than asking a neighbour), can be understood in the context of a broader Australian suburban cultural identity; an identity in which people are encouraged to be 'lifters not leaners' and to maintain the appearance of self-sufficiency and independence. This need to be, and to appear to be, a lifter rather than a leaner is a key element of suburban habitus, informing as it does the social acceptability of asking for help and receiving generosity from others.

Reciprocation

The impact of this strong social norm of self-sufficiency for sharing was that people felt a need to 'give back' or ensure that they were known as givers first and receivers second. As a result participants from both groups displayed the desire to reciprocate any favours for which they were the recipient. For Bea, this meant practising direct reciprocity: "The person who gives me the favour is the favour I want to return" (BeaSH:Int1). Similarly Liz explained her relationship with her neighbours and her similar need to directly reciprocate. She wrote "[The neighbours] leant us snake lights and a long extension cord. We didn't really ask to borrow. They offered and we accepted. We gave them a bottle of wine the next day when we returned everything to say thanks" (LizMPE:Let1). Mel also felt a need to reciprocate favours but, at least with one neighbour it was not necessary to reciprocate immediately. She explained, "One neighbour I've got, yeah, I'm quite close to her and, yeah, she's the house I [go to], you know if I need an onion or a potato or something. [And] she's the same with us" (MelMPE:Int1).

Nancy also felt it was important to reciprocate neighbourly favours. When asked whether she shared anything with her neighbours Nancy laughingly replied:

Yeah! All the time. Always like, 'I've run out of sugar' but we'll do it by SMS. 'Are you home?', 'Do you have any sugar? I have run out', 'What are you making?' 'I'm making banana bread'. So basically they will come and you'll get the sugar and stuff and you'll make it and then you'll give them half of whatever [you make]... (NancyMPE:Int1).

In responding this way, Nancy indicated that within her neighbourhood the social norms of reciprocation were strong. Not only did she reciprocate immediately with whatever she had baked, but was able to provide similar favours to other women at different times.

Willingness to receive was increased when participants from the Sharehood (Bea, Nick) and the MPE (Mel, Liz) knew that they would be allowed to repay a favour. Mel told me that she had looked after a friend of hers who had been recovering from surgery and explained how much she had valued being able to look after her saying, "Yeah it was good, it was nice to know you could do that for someone... and [when she's been sick] I've always provided soup or magazines, and you want to make sure she's ok". She went on to explain that when she had had to undergo similar treatment, her friend revelled in the opportunity to reciprocate: "[Then when I had my operation] she said 'I'm glad I get the chance to reciprocate!'" (MelMPE:Int1). In Mel's case, it was her husband who had recognised the importance of letting her friend repay the favour observing, "She's going to be so offended if you don't go [and let her look after you]!" (MelMPE:Int1). For Mel not to have returned the favour would perhaps have been to indicate an unequal relationship between the two friends and would have stopped the friend from being able to adhere to the social norm of reciprocation.

So strong is this need to reciprocate, that in Bea's case, this meant that she almost decided not to participate in the Sharehood. She explained: "When [the Sharehood] all happened I was worried I couldn't give anything. I couldn't give anything!" (BeaSH:Int1). Bea was afraid that if she had nothing to offer the Sharehood, then she would not be a valued member and, limited by her own sense of self worth, would be unable to participate. Eventually Bea became an active member as a result of the encouragement from neighbours she met when she happened to come across a Sharehood picnic in the park. While Bea may have felt she had nothing to give, someone like Penny would have

loved to have been able to offer the tools in her shed, whether or not Bea had anything to give back. Yet for Bea, the importance of being known as a giver and not just a receiver was enough to make her initially hesitant about participating. Indeed in my own experiences establishing a Sharehood, one of the most common responses I had to the idea was ‘That’s awesome, I wish I had something I could offer’; the ability to give seems closely linked with the ability to receive.

While Bea expressed her fear of being unable to offer anything to a sharing network, she later reflected on a place in which she was confident to participate in acts of sharing – her community garden. Otherwise nervous of receiving Bea found that in the context of shared areas of the community garden, “The pulling of weeds has entitled me to take a little [garden produce] back” (BeaSH:Int2). Bea explained how much she loved the sense of satisfaction that came with participating in such an exchange saying, “That I adore. I adore it. ‘Cause I don’t like it if I can’t give something back. I just don’t feel right about it” (BeaSH:Int2). Bea’s comments reveal the informal social norms at play in her suburban life, indicating the need to ensure that in balance an individual is seen to give at least an equal, if not greater, amount than they receive.

Suburban social norms that shape the importance of reciprocity also influence how much and when it is acceptable to give and receive. Reflecting again on his Australian hitchhiking experience Nick wrote:

Once I stayed at someone’s house for a night in Newcastle, [and] then moved to a hostel the next night for fear of imposing myself. I didn’t really know the person, and they had a very small house. I went to the hostel and felt really lonely and miserable there. So the next day I called up and asked if I could come back and stay again! They had been wondering if they’d done something to offend. I went back again and cooked them dinner and we had a lovely night – I think that cooking dinner was important for me because it made me feel like I was contributing something (NickSH:Let5).

Thus for Nick to be able to receive the hospitality of these people, he felt the need to reciprocate in some way.

Nick’s original discomfort at staying with people he didn’t know very well may have come from his uncertainty about the social norms and protocols of staying in the home of a relative stranger. As well as the usual uncertainties about norms specific to the

house, such as whether to take shoes off at the door, or whether it is polite to help yourself to a cup of tea, Nick may have been challenged in his uncertainty about the larger act of being there at all. Nick had no previous experience to help him understand the social norms for staying in the home of a relative stranger. Indeed there are very few examples in popular media of people staying in the homes of strangers, nearly all examples involve existing strong relationships, or accommodation in impersonal hostels or hotels. The lack of precedent for staying for ‘free’ in other people’s homes meant Nick felt awkward about possibly imposing. However when he left, his hosts in turn felt uncomfortable as Nick appeared unable to accept their gift of accommodation and company. Using Bourdieu’s concepts, the potential awkwardness to emerge as a result of Nick leaving is due to the ambiguity of such an action, as it may signal that Nick considers the hosts to be unworthy of the effort of maintaining an ongoing relationship (Bourdieu 1977, p.20). Nick’s hosts may have interpreted his departure as a sign that Nick found them boring, or difficult, or that their house was unclean and conversation offensive. Similarly the importance of avoiding such ambiguity may have been what prompted Mel’s husband above, to urge Mel to allow her friend to reciprocate care.

Participants from both groups also expressed a desire to ‘give back’ more generally. For example, MPE resident Nancy explained that while caring for her two children at home full time, she also ran a small Nutrimerics business selling cosmetics. She explained that she wanted to generally ensure that she was giving the community as much as she was getting saying “With my Nutrimerics, that is for me like, it’s not really about the money. It’s about giving back to other mums, letting them have some time where I can pamper them” (NancyMPE:Int1). That Nancy felt the need to give back more generally, without a direct sense of what she was repaying, can be understood in terms of Sahlins’ (1974) concept of generalised reciprocity, as discussed in Chapter One. Sahlins argues that inherent in all forms of resource distribution there is a weak obligation to reciprocate and thus Nancy may be responding to this general sense and ensuring that her general debts of reciprocation were covered.

Nancy saw the opportunity for generosity, couched in the language of sharing, through business exchanges in which she would benefit financially. In some ways, Nancy’s example feels counter-intuitive. That access to financial capital is valued highly by participants from MPEs, as shown in Chapter Five, points to the assumption that Nancy was the one benefitting from the exchange. So how can she consider that her

Nutrimetics business is an act of generous sharing when *she* is the one *receiving* the money? Selling Nutrimetics usually involves some kind of social gathering, cosmetic demonstrations and probably some food at a domestic home. For Nancy, perhaps simply to by creating a space for women to get together she feels that she is contributing to the development of social connection, and thus social capital.

While participants from both groups shared a sense of discomfort at being in the position of receiver, they also shared a general set of rules for negotiating such awkwardness which helped to shape the way they conceptualised and practised sharing. On page 181 I drew on the definitions of sharing provided by Lauren, Liz and Nick. Lauren and Liz both explicitly stated that sharing was non-reciprocal; while Nick's understanding was that it did not *necessarily* involve reciprocation. Yet the ability to reciprocate in practices of sharing was important for participants from both the Sharehood and MPEs because Australian suburban norms of sharing tend to marginalise the reciprocal nature of sharing and valourise the act of giving over the act of receiving. Such norms contribute to the sense felt by participants that it is important not only that they retained an identity as givers rather than receivers, but that by being primarily viewed as givers they might be able to receive from others without compromising their understandings of themselves as 'lifters'. Sharing was thus understood by many participants as involving the act of 'giving back'. An internal record of favours given and favours received was one way that participants managed to negotiate the socially treacherous waters of giving and receiving. For several participants from both the Sharehood and MPEs, 'giving back' often meant returning a favour – a kind of balancing of the ledger.

Obligation

The examples given above that emphasise the social norms of reciprocity tend to show a kind of eager willingness on behalf of participants to 'do the right thing' and to be perceived as generous people; lifters not leaners. In writing about the concept of 'the gift', Davies et al. summarise Maurice Godelier's argument that "gift giving is a paradox: while the giver reaches out to the receiver through an act of sharing, s/he also places the receiver in a position of indebtedness, a duty to reciprocate" (2010, p.414). That participants from both groups so strongly expressed the need to reciprocate introduces another theme emerging from the data – *obligation*.

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines obligation in seven different ways, the most relevant to this study being that obligation is “a benefit, favour or service, for which gratitude is due” or “the state or fact of being indebted for a benefit, favour, or service” (Delbridge 2001, p.1321). That obligation carries with it an assumption of ‘debt’ makes it an uncomfortable state for people who strive to adhere to strong social norms of self-sufficiency and, to return to the language of Menzies (1949), to be good citizens who “by thrift and self-sacrifice establish homes and bring up families and add to the national pool of savings and hope some day to [owe] nothing to anybody”. Thus the act of receiving carries with it a strong social imperative to ‘give back’ or risk being negatively judged.

Bourdieu helps to explain why participants were so quick to reciprocate and rid themselves of a sense of obligation to their neighbours. Bourdieu argues that the gift, understood by participants to be an act of sharing, “is expressed in the language of obligation. It is obligatory, it creates obligation, it sets up legitimate domination” (2000, p.198). To be obliged to someone is to acknowledge a debt, and to feel the need to repay a gift or favour. Bourdieu explains that there are a plethora of social intricacies surrounding the obligation and repayment of debt. Insight into some of these intricacies can be found in the work of seventeenth century nobleman and writer Francois de La Rochefoucault who explained “overmuch eagerness to discharge one’s obligations is a form of ingratitude” (cited in Bourdieu 1977, p.6). De La Rochefoucault argues that the timing of reciprocation and repayment has implications for the maintenance and development of social relationships. The need expressed by participants to ‘give back’ suggests that obligation is a significant element of how sharing is understood and experienced.

French sociologist Marcel Mauss also sheds important insight on the obligatory nature of gift giving. Mauss is best known for his work *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (1969 [1925]), in which he claims that there is no such thing as a ‘free’ gift – an obligation to reciprocate is given with every gift. In *The Gift*, Mauss explains that he focuses his analysis on gifts given in the payment or the performance of a service which “in theory are voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but in fact are obligatory and interested” (1969 [1925], p. 1). Such a way of conceptualising gift giving fits with participants’ experiences and accounts of neighbourly sharing. For example participants expressed that to share, particularly if one

is on the receiving end, is to increase the risk of social discomfort because of how it may lead to possible future social entanglements (as discussed in Chapter Five) as a result of obligation. For example, if I were to ask to borrow a wheelbarrow from my neighbour, I would be at once asking to receive and at the same time offering the *gift of my obligation*. If she agrees to lend the wheelbarrow then, according to the social norms surrounding reciprocal sharing relations, my neighbour could come at any time and ask me to return the favour by lending me her ladder. Regardless of whether or not I want to lend the ladder, it would be socially difficult for me to refuse. My refusal would be difficult because of the need to appear to be a generous person. To refuse would be to risk being labelled as someone who takes but does not give. And such a person, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, is to be considered as a second class citizen. Not only that, but in challenging social norms surrounding the importance of generous sharing, I risk damaging my relationship with my neighbour. As Liz explained, she was hesitant to get involved in too many exchanges with neighbours in her suburb because she “Would... hate for there to be disagreement amongst neighbours” (LizMPE:Let3).

Reflecting on the importance of obligation in participant accounts of suburban sharing, I again consider the need participants felt to reciprocate favours immediately. For example: Liz’s comments from page 189 that her next door neighbour, without being asked, lent her ‘snake lights and a table’. Liz explained that “We returned them and gave [the neighbour] a bottle of wine”. There are a number of ways that Liz’s actions could have been interpreted. First, Liz’s neighbour may be thankful for the wine and appreciate the fact that Liz and her housemates valued and took care of the equipment. Liz’s neighbour may have seen the wine as an acknowledgment of a favour and it may have helped to generate an increased sense of goodwill as each acknowledged what the other had to give (a shared contribution to the pool of social capital). On the other hand, Liz’s neighbour could have felt slightly awkward about this return gift. Bourdieu would suggest that this was because of the eagerness displayed by Liz to reciprocate and the way that this could then be interpreted “as a sign of impatience with dependence, and therefore virtually ingratitude, because of the haste it expresses, a hast to acquit debt, to be quits, to be free to quit... to shed an obligation and a recognition of debt” (Bourdieu 2000, p.198). In immediately repaying the obligations, Liz is potentially refusing the possibility of an ongoing relationship.

In offering to lend lights and a table, Liz's neighbour may also have been *asking* Liz to acquire an obligation. For Liz to reciprocate so soon with a bottle of wine was for her to sever the right of her neighbour to ask a favour at some unforeseeable time in the future. Thus Liz becomes the one denying her neighbour the opportunity to at some stage ask a favour of her own. With the bottle of wine, as well as saying 'thanks', Liz might well have said 'thanks for the loan of your equipment, here is a bottle of wine which means I no longer owe you and that we do not need to ever talk to each other again'. This is not to say that she and her neighbour will not talk again, rather the original obligation for Liz to be available for a return favour no longer remains in quite the same way. Indeed it is entirely possible that as a result of the goodwill displayed in the offering of the lights and the return of them with wine, that Liz and her neighbour will recognise each other as having good characters and will thus be open to an ongoing relationship.

Giver as receiver

While participants from the Sharehood and MPEs found it difficult to position themselves as the receiver, there also emerged a common theme showing that in some instances to give was also to receive (Bea, Nick, Kristin, Penny, Mel, Liz, Nancy). Some participants implied this within their accounts of suburban life, while others more consciously recognised the sometimes interchangeable nature of giving and receiving. For example, through the act of giving, the giver may improve their relationship with their neighbour, as was the case with Liz and the box of chocolates and the bottle of wine. The benefit to the giver of the generous act of giving can also be seen in the example of Tony and Joe above, where Tony helped Joe to get a job as a mechanic. It was obvious from the tone of Tony's voice that while Joe received help in finding a new job, Tony also received something of benefit: Tony received a sense of worth, value and belonging as he was able to make use of his access to cultural capital and contribute to the broader pool of social capital. As psychologist Ellen Langer (2000) explains, the act of giving is a way of helping ourselves to feel more effective, useful and generous.

Only three participants (Bea, Kristin, Nancy) *explicitly* acknowledged the possibility of giver as receiver. Bea provided a clear example of this when she explained how she was the recipient of an act of sharing which she saw as profoundly generous. Bea had been

offered a lift to an out of town community event by a woman in her neighbourhood whom she had never met. Bea wrote:

I experienced the single most kind act I have ever experienced in my life... why is it [a lift] such a big deal? Well it is because when she got there she went straight back home again, because her 15 year old son had been out all night and she was worried. While we were travelling she did not focus on her concerns but asked me 'about' me and shared about herself. I didn't realise what was really going on until we arrived. She had arranged a lift home for me too, and didn't even accept the petrol money that I had tried to hide in her notebook. All this from someone I didn't know! (BeaSH:Let7).

It is clear that Bea valued the lift immensely and indeed that the woman 'shared about herself' was obviously understood by Bea to be a giving of intimacy and the beginnings of a relationship. Yet it is also possible to perceive that Bea was assisting this woman by providing her with the opportunity to forget about her missing son by doing someone else some good.

In considering sharing as an act of giving, the work of Davies et al. (2010) helps to explore the phenomena of giver as receiver. Davies et al. argue that gift giving occurs on a spectrum and that gifts can be both transactional and relational and that:

The gift involves the selection and transfer of something to someone without the expectation of direct compensation, but with the expectation of return, be it reciprocity, a change in the relationship with the recipient, or a favour or another social or psychological benefit (2010, p.414).

The woman who assisted Bea was clearly able to benefit psychologically and socially as she dealt with her concern about her son.

MPE resident Nancy provides another example of an interested practice of generous sharing. Nancy explained that because her husband was away in the armed services she made more of an effort to get to know her neighbours saying:

Because I spend a lot of time... with my husband away... I have kind of always put myself out there to meet everyone... I [knocked on the doors in this street] and invited [the neighbours] over for a barbeque and tea, which I know is very old school but that's me. I think that... the

Services has a lot to do with it. Because we don't have family around we sort of need to, sort of connect with people a bit more and get into that sort of stuff (NancyMPE:Int1).

Although Nancy never articulated that she was laying the groundwork for later community support, in giving her neighbours the gift of a shared meal and through the meal access to desired social connection, she was positioning herself as a 'giver'. Nancy is clearly 'invested' in the social game of suburban neighbourhood life. Having demonstrated her ability to give, Nancy is more likely to feel comfortable about being on the receiving end of a neighbourhood exchange.

Bourdieu's discussion of capital, and in particular what it means to be 'interested' is also helpful for shedding light on motivations and interactions of sharing relationships in the suburban field and assists in conceptualising giver as receiver. Bourdieu argues that

To understand the notion of interest, it is necessary to see that it is opposed not only to that of disinterestedness or gratuitousness but also that of *indifference*. To be indifferent is to be unmoved by the game... interest is to be invested, taken in and by the game. To be interested is to accord a given social game that what happens in it matters, that its states are important... and worth pursuing (in Bourdieu & Wacziarg 1992, p.116).

In Australian capitalist society today, interest is deemed to be related to economic interest, and no effort is made to hide the interested nature of financially based transactions. For example, I might work in a supermarket in order to get paid, in order to buy food and pay rent. I do not just turn up at work and serve customers all day purely for the love of it and the greater good of society. In such a context, exchange (serve customers and stock shelves in return for money) is understood to be interested: I make no effort to hide the fact that I am doing it for personal gain, although I am also, at the same time contributing to the wealth of the nation and the strength of its economy. As Moore (2008) argues, practices of sharing or giving when considered as acts of generosity are likely to be portrayed as disinterested, that is people engage in them for reasons other than personal gain.

Sharing, as articulated by participants, is understood as generally disinterested and more virtuous than any act of self-interest. Sharing and giving are understood to contribute to the development of social capital and thus are somehow pure acts,

exempt from the interested nature of mercantile exchange and therefore somehow more moral. In the remainder of this chapter I argue that sharing is inherently a self-interested practice and an inherently pro-social act as it contributes to the development not only of individual well being, but to the wider neighbourhood pool of social capital.

To argue that sharing is at once generous *and* self-interested is to challenge existing norms that valorise giving over receiving. Moore (2008) argues that Bourdieu, in using the language of symbolic (social and cultural) capital, is “presenting a challenge or provocation by coupling the sacred with the profane” (2008, p.104). This may help to explain the difficulty people have in recognising the co-existence of generosity and self-interest within the one act of sharing. That is, that explicitly, the habitus that shapes understanding of appropriate acts of self-interest does not include acts of generous sharing.

Bourdieu explains that this mismatch in expectations of practice is because conscious understandings of social capital as purely generous are incorrect, writing:

What is underlined through gift exchange, a collective hypocrisy in an act through which society pays homage to its realm of virtue and disinterestedness, is in fact that virtue is a political matter, that it is not and cannot be abandoned [to the realm of the individual] (2000, p.201).

In essence, society separates ‘being good’ from being self-interested and the social norms of suburban life present in the narratives described in Chapter Three and in the data support this. Applied to sharing, this means that the element of sharing related to obligation is often hidden in discussions of the sharing society and the potential of sharing to do ‘good’. From Bourdieu’s perspective, the practice of sharing as interested is a tacit, embodied and mostly unrecognised part of the social systems of social capital. Moore’s (2008) observation that social relations are valued as sacred is pertinent to understanding the implications of sharing as generous, in that acts of generosity are above any kind of reproach.

As I’ve already argued the practice of neighbourly sharing is about more than tangible exchange. Sharing works to create social connection through neighbourly relations and obligations. The repayment of debt, the need to reciprocate, is an opportunity, and an obligation, to interact with a neighbour. The gift of obligation, through the asking of a

favour, is essentially an invitation to, and an acknowledgement of, an ongoing relationship. This is because of the social norms of suburban social interaction that dictate that debts and favours need to be repaid. As such, acts of generous sharing can be at once acts of giving *and* receiving.

That the giver could also be the receiver is in part because sharing exchanges are not just limited to material and tangible objects, but can also involve immeasurable things such as esteem. Encoded within the offer of a material object, such as the lending of a lawnmower, is an unspoken exchange of regard. For example rather than understanding that I lend you my lawnmower simply because I am a generous person, I lend you the lawnmower in *exchange* for your respect and recognition of me as a generous person, as someone who contributes to society. The existence of such an exchange was not consciously recognised by participants and thus in the absence of an explicit arrangement that you will increase your respect for me, my offer of the lawnmower appears altruistic and generous. As Bourdieu argues:

In short, contrary to naïve idyllic representations of ‘pre-capitalist’ societies (or in the ‘cultural’ sphere of capitalist societies), practice never ceases to conform to economic calculation even when it gives every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation (in the narrow sense) and playing for stakes that are non-material and not easily quantified (1977, p.177).

Bourdieu’s discussion of honour and gifting helps to make sense of the ways in which givers are receivers, and the need to partake in relationships of obligation. He explains that a gift, or an offer, is a kind of challenge which honours the person to whom it is given. It is an honour, rather than a shame because in offering, it is assuming that a gift can be reciprocated (Bourdieu 1977, p.12). Bourdieu argues that to participate in gift exchange is to ‘play the game’ and that a return gift of greater value than the one received signals a willingness to participate in the game. Thus players are bound in an ongoing escalation of exchange that is only initiated when trust in each other is exhibited.

Similarly to borrow from someone, or to receive a favour, requires several levels of trust. Let’s assume that my neighbour Sam wanted to borrow my food dehydrator. In order for me to agree to lend it to him, I need to trust that he will look after it, use it properly, and return it in good condition. But to feel comfortable borrowing, Sam also

needs to trust that I trust him, not only to return the appliance in good condition, but to reciprocate at some point in the future. He has to trust that I trust that I can call on him and ask him to assist me in some way. This double trust loop acknowledges that a person can be a giver, but in doing so becomes a (future) receiver.

Suburban practices of neighbourly sharing can thus be understood as practices of social connection, in which to be either the giver or the receiver is to agree to engage with the possibilities of ongoing social relations. For those seeking connection, sharing relationships offer opportunities for a rich weave of social obligation and connection. However because of the inherently interested nature of sharing and the tangle of obligation and social involvement, it poses a potential risk that neighbours may become too close and become caught in escalating obligatory exchange – a realisation of the fears expressed by MPE residents in Chapter Five.

The recognition of sharing as a practice of self-interest is a radical shift in how the social norms of Australian identity are constructed. It is not ‘good form’ in the eyes of either the Sharehood or MPEs to be seen as acting in self interest. For example Bea’s fear of asking for favours, or taking from the garden without first contributing. To transform the consciously conceptualised understanding of sharing from being purely generous into an understanding of sharing that recognises elements of interested exchange, is to challenge the underlying norms of suburban identity.

Power

The examples provided by Bea and Nancy above, of situations in which the giver is also the receiver emphasise the potential personal benefits of generosity. In their stories, the initial act of giving is portrayed as being done without thought for the benefits that may later occur. For example while Nancy recognised the future benefits of hosting a barbeque, she also strongly expressed an ethic of ‘giving back’ and contributing to community life. However participants also provided other examples in which people were assumed to be giving *in order* to receive personally, without thought of the benefit to others. Several members of the Sharehood noticed how acts of generous sharing could in practice be acts of domination, in some cases to the detriment of others.

James explained that in his local Sharehood there was a man who had helpfully provided the group with specialised equipment for a community project. This man had acted generously, yet he had created a sense of discomfort within the group. Implied within

James' explanation of this man was the understanding that he did not feel as bound by the social norms of the groups, nor the wider norms of the neighbourhood, because of the size of the 'debt' that the group owed him – despite the fact that he had ostensibly given freely. Ultimately this sense of unease led to the group slowly cutting him out of social activities even though this went against their values of social inclusion. As James explained, "One of the reasons we don't like him is that he likes to... have everyone owe him favours and, like, make people do things for him" (JamesSH:Int1). Peterson argues that "giving can be construed as both rude and dominating – even as an aggressive act – where large gifts are concerned" (1993, p.869). It was ultimately the sense of being obliged to someone who was perceived to be acting aggressively for personal gain that led James and his Sharehood to sever relations with that particular member.

Bea also provided an example of what she saw as the use of generous sharing as a potential act of domination. Bea's habitus developed in a way that valorised giving, at least in part through her experiences growing up in rural Victoria. Understanding these formative experiences around practices of neighbourly sharing, and neighbourly give and take, her previously discussed fear of being unable to give is perhaps unsurprising:

I remember at nine years old there was a family [who] lost their house in a fire... No one had ever spoken to them, and my parents didn't speak to them... I knew the girls at school but I was told not to get too friendly with them because they were... from a different country. [After their house burnt down] everybody in the neighbourhood... built them a barn, everyone brought animals and casseroles. Streams of cars would come up and deliver [help] to these people. The people were in shock. Everyone went away and still didn't speak to them (BeaSH:Int1).

I asked Bea why people went to help a family whom they wanted nothing to do with, and why after helping them they still continued to ignore them socially. She continued "Well, they were our community. Makes us look bad if we don't give. But not *give* – be seen to give" (BeaSH:Int1). That is, in this instance, the actual giving was less important than the *appearance* of giving. People in Bea's town were acting, at least in part, to maintain their social standing and reputation through the fulfilment of social obligation.

Bea's example highlights how the act of generous sharing can function in a number of different ways. Komter observes, "gift giving may serve to dominate, humiliate and to make others dependent on our benevolence and our willingness to share valuables and

resources with them”(2007, p.99). From Bea’s perspective her rural community was giving in order not only to ‘do the right thing’, but to feel good in themselves and their ability to give. In considering the significance of social norms of obligation that go with the act of giving, Davies et al. argue that “the promise of the [gift] is double edged with the potential to bond each other or to reaffirm the other’s secret suspicions of mistrust and personal inadequacy” (2010, p.416). From Bea’s perspective, while wanting to participate in their community as good citizens, her rural neighbours may have also used the act of sharing as a way of reinforcing the inadequacy of the foreign family and creating potential humiliation and sense of dependency. This is because having left immediately after giving, the foreign family was left no way to reciprocate the favour being once again cut off from the community more generally, and thus a power imbalance remained. Enacting practices of sharing, especially when sharing is being primarily understood as generous giving, can be as much about negotiations of identity as it is about the exchange and transfer of material possessions.

That sharing is so strongly linked to notions of social position and identity is not limited to Australian suburban life. For the Yolgnu people of Arnhem Land in northern Australia, the practice of sharing is about the act of asking – what Peterson (1993) calls ‘demand sharing’. In his paper *Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity Among Foragers*, Peterson explains how, while acts of generosity are valued highly, “acts of giving and sharing are usually only in response to direct verbal and/or nonverbal demands” (1993, p.860). Indeed for a Yolgnu person to *offer* before they have been asked is to risk the shame of having someone refuse the gift. This contrasts to the suburban context as explained by participants, where initial refusal of a gift or favour is the social norm. While there are significant differences in cultural practices, the behaviour of both participants and people in traditional Yolgnu society is shaped by understandings of culturally appropriate behaviour enacted in order to reduce the risk of shame or social discord.

Reflecting on some of the issues of power within practices of sharing, I wrote to Nick of an experience where I felt someone was giving generously in order to dominate me. I explained that a man, whom I knew through work, had offered me a lift to the train station. The way in which this lift was offered and given felt to me like an attempt to demonstrate some kind of power. Nick responded to my story by writing “The one lesson I have learnt, I think, is that it is also a gift to receive openly. So when the big man

gives you a lift, by accepting it, you are offering him something just as good in return. No need to resent him!” (NickSH:Let5). Nick’s way of dealing with feelings of power imbalance was to suggest positioning oneself as the receiver and acknowledging the give and take of all exchange.

Power and research relationships

Through ongoing analysis and the continually reflexive approach to orienting concepts, and as I began to recognise the complex relationships between obligations to reciprocate and issues of power, I found myself reflecting on the give and take relationship between myself and research participants. I spent a lot of time thinking about how I was engaged primarily in the practice of receiving as participants gave time and energy to a project many of them had only a passing interest in. Like many of the participants, the need to ‘give back’ forms a part of my habitus. I deliberated over the ways I could repay people for their time and interest in my work. For some participants, listening to their stories, writing considered and engaged responses and attempting to portray their perspectives as fairly as possible seemed appropriate forms of reciprocity. For others, with whom I met more than once, I usually offered to buy coffee or lunch. One of these experiences I recorded in my research journal.

Bea and I had previously met over lunch on our first interview and each of us had paid for our own meal. Having spent 12 months exchanging letters with Bea and feeling deeply indebted to her for her time, on our second lunch I asked if I could pay. The bill was not insubstantial; and she looked at me long and hard while I reassured her that I had a budget for this sort of thing. Eventually she agreed but insisted that she pay next time, perhaps highlighting her need to be seen to give as much as she received.

Yet it was not Bea’s desire to pay for our next lunch that made me stop and think. After lunch I had intended on saying ‘thank you’ by giving her a small gift, yet something made me reconsider. As I wrote in my research journal immediately afterwards:

I bought some Tassie honey to give her (she’s fond of bees), but actually decided that given she’d let me pay already it wouldn’t be the right thing to do. I think it had something to do with wanting her to feel like we have an equal partnership and that actually me giving too much will stuff up that delicate balance... (Research Journal, June 2011).

The care I took in my consideration of an appropriate acknowledgement and thanks for Bea was a result of the knowledge that participants were fully aware of the potential power imbalances that practices of sharing and exchange incur. Bea was particularly sensitive to this explaining that she had been undiagnosed and unsupported with a chronic illness for a number of years and the result was she “Became a little more insular and a little too self-sufficient, maybe” (BeaSH:Int1). Bea did not want to put herself into a situation in which she was obliged to repay with something she did not have, and I wanted Bea to understand that I respected our relationship by ensuring I gave no more than I took and thus not seeking to ‘dominate’.

The motivation for generous behaviour is at once driven by the desire to *be* generous, the need to *appear* generous, and the intangible benefits that come from both being and appearing to be capable and interested in contributing to the common good. Behaviour that is generous can also ultimately be beneficial to the giver, as was seen in discussions of power above, and behaviour that is apparently selfish can also benefit others. As a result it is an artificial separation to assume that some practices are generous and some are self-interested. It is fine line between sharing as an act of domination and sharing as an act of generous giving in which one can expect to eventually benefit. While intent to share for selfish or selfless reasons may vary, the capacity of the individual to share in a way that is seamlessly congruent with the social norms of the field will influence whether an act is considered generous or selfish.

It is possible to become cynical at this point and to assume that all forms of apparently generous behaviour are selfish. Indeed Mauss appears to paint a fairly bleak view of gift giving when he argues that “the form usually taken [by gifts] is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest” (1969 [1925], p. 1). While Mauss’ work was conducted in a cultural context very different to that of Australian suburban life, his observations about the social obligation to reciprocate as being essentially hidden within acts of generous giving runs parallel with the themes emerging from research data and discussed thus far. Yet this is not to say that cynicism is justified. I have also shown that it is *through* unspoken obligatory reciprocation that social bonds develop, social connection occurs and social capital accrues.

Sharing as pro-social

The theory of the gift is the theory of human solidarity (Douglas 2004)

Having argued that participants are hesitant to ask and wary of obligation, I now suggest that the act of asking can in itself be a way of establishing trust and social connection. Let me illustrate with a personal anecdote, that draws on the discussion above, showing how asking for help in a non-crisis situation can assist in the development of relationships and the creation of social connection. My brother-in-law Jeremy is an economist and has been following my research with enthusiasm. He has patiently answered my questions about economics and as such has been privy to how my thinking about interested and disinterested social behaviours has unfolded. He is always eager to apply things to his own life and recently wrote to tell me about how our conversations about sharing had resulted in a change in his behaviour. Jeremy explained how he had gone down to the work bicycle parking to get his bike and ride home. About to ride off he realised he had a punctured tyre. Normally, he explained, he would have just caught the bus home or called his wife, however, inspired by our conversations on sharing he decided to ask other cyclists for a spare inner tube. After asking a few people, none of whom had spare bicycle patches, a man called Steve offered to help.

The next day Jeremy found Steve at his desk and presented him with a new inner tube, explaining that he'd ended up having to call his wife anyway because he had accidentally exploded the new tube when fitting it to his bike. Steve gave him some tips on how to stop new tubes exploding. Having got his bicycle in working order, Jeremy emailed Steve and thanked him for the advice. What followed was a friendly email exchange about the pros and cons of different bicycle tyres. Jeremy forwarded the exchange to me writing "See – suddenly I have a new friend at the office. And all achieved by imposing on him!" By intruding on a stranger, Jeremy was exposing himself as dependent rather than self-sufficient and as a result was potentially causing someone an inconvenience. Yet by asking for an inner tube, Jeremy was in fact *offering* the possibility of a future relationship with a stranger in which the stranger was likely to benefit (as did Jeremy with both the material item – the inner tube – and then less immediately obvious benefit of a new positive relationship).

Jeremy was also offering Steve the opportunity to prove that he was useful. In his book *What Makes Us Tick? The Ten Desires that Drive Us*, social commentator Hugh Mackay

lists the desire to be useful as one of the key drivers of human behaviour in Australia. He writes

The desire [to be useful] itself is almost universal: most of us want to play a useful part in society; most of us want to be good neighbours, good parents, good partners, reliable employees, responsible citizens. These desires are not usually expressed in particularly noble or dramatic ways: offering to take in the neighbour's garbage bin or look after their mail while they are on holiday might seem routine acts of neighbourliness, but they are small symbols of the much larger desire to make a useful contribution to the life of a fully functioning, civil society (2010, p.130).

In lending the spare inner tube, Steve was able to fulfil his likely need to be useful through a small and seemingly inconsequential act. Yet Jeremy took a risk in asking for that tube. In asking, he was aware of the social norms and protocols which would shape the type of repayment required – the replacement of the inner tube with an acknowledgement of appreciation.

For Jeremy to ask to borrow an inner tube was in a sense also an invitation for an ongoing relationship, and a challenge to Steve to prove his capacity for generosity. Jeremy and his colleague now also have a bond that did not previously exist, due in part to the shared experience of cycling and in part due to the obligation that Jeremy now has, the obligation to be available to reciprocate at some point. The risk taken by Jeremy is that Steve might require a repayment for his favour in a way Jeremy is uncomfortable with, or he may take it as a sign that they are now best friends and constantly distract him by the photocopier, always try to sit next to him at lunch time, or ask to ride home with him and chat. Such attention may be undesirable to Jeremy, yet such was the nature of the risk he took in initiating communication.

In considering Jeremy's story, it is important to remember that the exchange between him and Steve took place within a particular field – the workplace. Simply because of the professional context that he was in, Jeremy was able to assume a number of things about Steve. He could assume that he was likely to be someone similar to him, as they worked in the same workplace and both rode bicycles, and he could also assume that given the work culture of the place Steve was likely to be reliably professional in his behaviour.

The neighbourhood setting however is slightly more fraught as the rules of interaction are often less clearly defined (see Chapter Five) than in the workplace. The suburban field is a mixture of intimacy and private retreat (see Chapter Six) which contributes to the already cloudy understandings of appropriate sharing interactions with neighbours. Given this uncertainty in the suburban field, people must risk a sense of social vulnerability, vulnerability in the sense of being judged and risking social standing and esteem, if they are to initiate exchange relationships.

In her work on vulnerability, Brene Brown (2010) interviewed hundreds of people about their lives and compared those who had a strong sense of love and belonging to those who struggled. She argues that the difference between those who flourish and those who don't is in how the idea of vulnerability is embraced by those who are happy. Brown explains,

They fully embraced vulnerability. They believed that what made them vulnerable made them beautiful. They didn't talk about vulnerability being comfortable, nor did they talk about it being excruciating ... They just talked about it being necessary. They talked about the willingness to say 'I love you first'. The willingness to do something where there are no guarantees... to be willing to invest in a relationship that may or may not work (2010, n.p.).

Brown argues that those who embrace vulnerability live wholeheartedly and that others who want to learn to live this way need to do the following things; people need to let themselves be seen, deeply seen, vulnerably seen. They need to live with "whole hearts" despite uncertainty and lack of guaranteed outcomes. And they need to "practice gratitude and lean into joy" (B. Brown 2010). In essence there needs to be an acceptance of the importance and unavoidable presence of vulnerability in establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships with those around us.

In applying Brene Brown's argument to this study, Nick's experience staying with strangers in Newcastle (page 190) is the perfect example of how an acknowledgement of vulnerability ultimately led to a positive experience. Nick's experience suggests that in becoming socially vulnerable – through the act of asking to return to stay that night at the home of relative strangers – those strong social connections so desired by participants may be nurtured. In effect, the very act of becoming socially vulnerable may

be demonstrative of strong social capital, a form of capital that, as Bourdieu argues, is often dismissed as unimportant.

More than a financial economy

In Western countries, economic rationality often forms the basis for the entire scope of rational decision making (Diesing 1962, Kurlfink & C. K. Harris 2003). Bourdieu argues that in recent times there has been a shift from holistic valuing of possessions, such as land, to an increasing focus on the financial worth of things. He argues, now “activity can be directed towards an exclusively economic end, the end which money, henceforward the measure of all things, starkly designates” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 176). The effect of this is to place limitations on the implied and unspoken values of social relations which shape behaviour. Mauss (1969 [1925]) explains the development of the separation between economic capital and other types of capital as a transition from a gift economy, in which goods or services are given without the explicit arrangement for reciprocal payment, to a mercantile economy in which explicit agreements are made about trade. Mauss argues:

It was precisely the Romans and Greeks who, possibly following the Northern and Western Semites, drew on the distinction between personal rights and real rights, separated purchases from gifts and exchanges, dissociated moral obligations from contracts, and, above all, conceived of the difference between ritual, rights and interests. By a genuine, great and venerable revolution they passed beyond the excessively hazardous, costly and elaborate gift economy, which was encumbered with personal considerations, incompatible with the development of the market, trade and production, and, in a word, uneconomic (1969 [1925], p. 52).

While Mauss refers to the gift economy as being eclipsed by the modern economy, themes emerging from interviews and letters with participants from both the Sharehood and MPEs indicate that contemporary Australian suburban society affords a kind of underground gift economy.

To engage in practices of sharing, is to engage in an inherently interested practice of social exchange. Bourdieu argues that despite emphasis on economic capital, people invest in relationships, be they with family, work colleagues, neighbours or others, in much the same way in which they make financial investments. He writes:

The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights) (1985, p.249).

Thus sharing, as a practice, becomes a way of developing and maintaining relationships rather than a simple offering of material possessions or services. Bourdieu's insight helps in understanding the experiences of sharing, as articulated by participants, in a far more nuanced way than simple explanations of generous giving. Instead, the give and take of social obligation and neighbourly exchange is an important part of the development of social connection and social capital. Indeed this is partially why so many participants were drawn to the idea of increased social connection with neighbours, and for Sharehood members why they explicitly sought to share.

According to Komter (2007) it is this exchange of give and take that sustains community, binding people together through expressions of mutual loyalty and the creation of strengthening ties. In this perhaps, the act of sharing is pro-social in a broad sense, contributing to the development of suburban neighbourhood social capital. Like the culturalist approach I have been taking, the naturalist argument also positions sharing as pro-social (Komter 2007). Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1989) argues that the preservation of the human species relies on altruistic and reciprocal behaviours. As Winterhalden (1997, p.133) explains, the practice of sharing in hunter gatherer societies helped to reduce risk and increase survival through the sharing of meat during times of abundance. The naturalist argument attributes the desire to share as being inherently biologically driven.

Psychologists Delton et al., (2011) also agree with the potential importance of generosity and abundance sharing for survival, arguing:

Generosity evolves because, at the ultimate level, it is a high return cooperation strategy... even in the absence of any apparent potential for gain. Human generosity, far from being a thin veneer of cultural conditioning atop a Machiavellian core, may turn out to be a bedrock feature of human nature (2011, p.13340)

Of course, it is important to remember that the maintenance of a 'community' is not inherently good or bad. As Komter (2007, p.97) points out the act of gift exchange, or generous sharing, can just as easily be the cement for a community of crooks as it can be for a community of law abiding citizens.

The work of Dawkins and Delton et al. differs from the cultural analysis that I have been conducting which assumes that rather than a purely instrumental factor of human survival and an inherent part of what it means to be human, sharing is a culturally learned practice. This is not to say that the two cannot be complementary. The biological drivers of sharing can of course exist alongside cultural practices and will contribute to the underlying development of habitus to guide practices of sharing. Indeed the tendency to valorise the act of giving and background the act of receiving may draw on the recognition, conscious or otherwise, of the importance of such factors for group survival.

I have argued that while actively conceptualised by participants as an act of generous giving, sharing is also a self-interested practice. The findings above demonstrate that sharing often encompasses a complex mixture of self-less and self-interested motivations that, while incoherent in the abstract, are made coherent through the habitus of suburban life. In seeking to understand how sharing is conceptualised and practised, I thus challenge our cultural understandings of what it means to give and to receive. I seek to engage in discussion in a way that creates a dialogue rather than setting selflessness and selfishness in opposition: sharing (as a broad set of social practices) is not limited to being either a practice that is generous *or* one that is selfish. At the beginning of this chapter I set out the definitions of sharing as explicitly provided by research participants and then went on to explore the more implicit understandings of sharing. Yet it seems to me that Nick got it right the first time: "In some ways, I think of [sharing] as a kind of attitude, an openness and willingness to *help and be helped* and to work together" (NickSH:Let8 – my emphasis).

Chapter 8

Towards a sharing society



8: Towards a sharing society

It's Time For The Sharing Economy To Become The Sharing Society

(Horowitz, 2013).

Environmentally and socially Australian suburbs are likely to bear at least some of the brunt of the complex challenges of the twenty-first century (Gleeson 2010). I began this inquiry by describing the diverse individuals and organisations who are now championing sharing as the solution to many suburban ills. As I have argued, sharing is a set of complex social practices that are at once both selfless and self-interested. For sharing to be a useful approach to suburban problems, the way in which it is understood will need to be fundamentally transformed to include an understanding of sharing as an act of both giving and taking.

The aim of this study was to explore the possibilities of sharing in the Australian suburban context. That is, to consider how sharing might be useful in bringing about desired social and cultural changes in order to address pressing social and environmental issues. To do this I asked the primary research question – what does it mean to share? In answering this question I examined how two groups of Australian suburban residents (participants in the online sharing network the Sharehood, and residents of two Master Planned Estates) conceptualised and practised sharing. In the first half of this chapter I build on the conclusion that practices of sharing can be at once generous and self-interested and that through the weave of obligation they create, are inherently pro-social. I then articulate key contributions of this work to existing bodies of scholarly literature, before finally considering what both individuals and groups or sharing networks can learn from the findings of this work.

Conceptualising and practising sharing

Sharing as non-reciprocal?

Research participants from both the Sharehood and the MPEs conceptualised sharing as being a generous and pro-social behaviour. This emphasis on giving over receiving reflects the cultural influence of deeply entrenched norms of suburban life (as discussed in Chapter Three); suburbs as places of 'rest and retreat' and as places for 'contribution to citizenship and the common good', the suburbs as 'mediocre, dull and conformist',

‘isolating’ and as the cause of the ‘sustainability problem’. The significance of such narratives in shaping suburban experience emerged very strongly in discussion with research participants and influenced conceptualisations and practices of sharing.

The narrative of good citizenship and its emphasis on self-sufficiency and support of others, is one story that impacted obviously on how social norms of suburban living influence understandings of sharing. Social norms of suburban life are based around narratives of self-sufficiency and private ownership. These narratives shape what it means to live well in Australian suburbs. For example, the importance of being able to demonstrate an ability to look after oneself and to contribute to the common good, mean that the act of generous giving is privileged over the act of receiving.

This narrative of good citizenship and contribution to the common good also shapes suburban life in other ways. As discussed in Chapter Five, research participants from both groups want to live in suburbs where everyone contributes to the common good, be that labelled as ‘good citizenship’ or ‘the sharing society’. This was demonstrated in both the nostalgic references to previous ways of living where suburban life of the 1950s was defined by the easiness in which a cup of sugar was given and in the desire for ontological security. Both groups of participants sought such security through their participation in the Sharehood, or their decision to reside in a MPE.

That participants desired greater social connection with neighbours (as discussed in Chapter Six), and saw sharing as a way in which to develop this, is in tension with other social norms of suburban life. MPE residents in particular expressed a wariness of becoming too entangled with their neighbours, revealing a conflict between the narratives of good citizenship and contribution to common good and suburban rest and retreat. Such conflict leads to a wariness of sharing as a way of connecting with neighbours due to the recognition that with relationships of give and take come networks of social obligation. Such obligation may risk the suburbs as a place of retreat *from* neighbours. This risk of obligation was explored in Chapter Seven where it emerged that for participants, in most acts of giving, the giver is at once the giver *and* the receiver. Similarly, most participants explained they felt obliged to *give back* to whoever had done them a favour, as a way of avoiding lingering uncertainty about future obligation. The recognition of obligation as a concern suggests that sharing is not, in fact, a non-reciprocal practice.

Sharing as reciprocal?

Wariness about sharing as a risk to the suburban retreat makes sense in the light of the findings of Chapter Seven. Sharing is not only an act of generous, altruistic and pro-social behaviour, it is also inherently self-interested, to use the language of Bourdieu. In the Introduction to this work I noted the contested nature of concepts of sharing in popular and scholarly literatures. That sharing is experienced by participants as involving complex networks of reciprocity and obligation means that many scholarly interpretations of sharing as being a one way flow of resources do not fit with many everyday acts of sharing. In many ways sharing is experienced as a practice of gift giving *and* as a practice in which benefits flow to both giver and receiver. This paradox is powerfully evident in the experiences of Sharehood members and MPE residents.

A key factor curbing sharing is concern about becoming caught in a web of social obligation that may pose a possible threat to the privacy and autonomy of suburban life. Close examination of the role of sharing in the continual negotiation of social obligation suggests that alongside obligation sits opportunity for ongoing relationships and the building of social capital. In Chapter Five, these neighbourly relationships were expressed as highly desirable by participants from both groups. Thus the elements of sharing that challenge social norms of privacy and self-sufficiency are the ones which have the power to bring about not only stronger social connection but the social and environmental benefits of the 'sharing society' so desired by Sharehood members. For example, the very act of asking a neighbour for a cup of sugar is to risk a future obligation which may be called upon at an inconvenient time or in an awkward form. Yet it is this ability to *ask* at a potentially inconvenient time that is an indicator of the strength or existence of suburban social capital. Examples of this were seen in Mel's observations in Chapter Five about her neighbours who helped care for an elderly lady in the street; James' experience in Chapter Six of the way Kaitlin looked after him after his cat died; and Bea's story in Chapter Seven where she told of the lift she received from a stranger who was worried about her son.

As well as creating reciprocal bonds, to position oneself as someone who asks is to risk becoming vulnerable and to become caught in a trap of ongoing obligations. There is an interesting tension here between the vulnerability of an individual and an act of social connection that itself contributes to the *resilience*, to the social capital, of the community at large. As will be discussed below, this is a key contribution of this inquiry

to the existing bodies of work on both sharing and urban society. The ability of participants to overcome the fear of vulnerability makes the type of change required to increase sharing difficult as it goes against so many existing and deeply ingrained notions of normal and acceptable suburban behaviour. Yet it is this very element of vulnerability which acts to build trust and to ensure ongoing negotiation of relationships.

Dualities of sharing

The sharing experiences of both Sharehood members and MPE residents were fundamentally similar. Members of the Sharehood linked sharing with a broad social vision of suburban sustainability, while MPE residents favoured sharing for its role as a practice of good citizenship. Both groups linked sharing with contributions to the common good. Both groups experienced tensions between the different narratives of suburban life.

As argued in Chapter One, popular conceptualisations consider sharing as an act of generosity and self sacrifice in which the act of sharing is associated with generous giving. In the scholarly literature a greater tension exists between those who argue that sharing is a one-way flow of resources (Benkler 2004, Widlok 2004), and those that argue sharing is inherently reciprocal (Belk 2007). In answering the question what does it mean to share for Australian suburban residents, I conclude that sharing is at once an act of selfless giving, *and* a practice of self-interest. While such an understanding of sharing does not, on the surface, help to clarify the contested nature of sharing, it does help to provide a framework for understanding different experiences of sharing. Sharing can be both one way *and* reciprocal transfer of 'social' goods *at the same time*. Indeed I go so far as to argue that sharing, even as a deeply self-interested practice, is inherently pro-social, contributing as it does to the complex weave of social interaction. In making such an argument I agree with Belk who states "sharing tends to be a communal act that links us to other people. It is not the only way in which we may connect with others, but it is a potentially powerful one that creates feelings of solidarity and bonding" (2009, p.717).

On the surface the scholarly work on sharing has very little to do with academic studies of urban and suburban life. Yet as discussed in the body of this thesis, one of the key themes running through the urban studies literature relates to the presence and/or absence of strong social connections. My study makes a significant contribution to

understandings of human social life at the point where scholarly work on sharing and suburban life intersect. As such, the following section builds on the discussions of sharing above and outlines the key contributions of this work to studies of suburban life.

Contributing to suburban studies

As discussed in Chapter One, most of the research on sharing to date comes from the anthropological literature and focuses on exchange practices in non-western hunter-gatherer societies. Those studies that do examine western suburban cultures predominantly come from the field of market research and focus on practices of economic exchange. Such work sends the message that, unless based around the exchange of financial capital, sharing is only a complex and socially contextualised practice when conducted in ‘primitive’ societies. In contrast, my study has shown that far from being limited primarily to rational economic behaviour, suburban relationships of sharing are just as complex and multifaceted as the sharing relationships of the Yolgnu people as described by Peterson (1993), or the hunter-gatherers described by Bird-David (2005). At the same time I contribute to this literature at a theoretical level through the application of Bourdieu’s concepts habitus, field and capital as a way of gaining insight into social norms of sharing in the suburban context. I now turn to the implications of the complexity of suburban practice, not for only urban studies but also for policy makers and advocates of the sharing society.

There are two key ways that this study contributes to existing scholarly literature beyond the work explicitly on sharing. First, the findings challenge scholarly and popular discourses that at once present suburban residents as part of an unthinking homogenous mass (see Newman 1991; Hawley 2003; Holmgren 2005). Second, this work provides insight into how the dream of strongly connected neighbourhoods might be accomplished. This dream can be achieved by expanding our understanding of what it means to share, to include the act of receiving, and in doing so challenging and transforming social norms of sharing and neighbourhood interaction.

One of the challenges of this study has been to navigate a careful path between the various different stereotypes, experiences and representations of Australian suburban life. As a result I included in my study two very different manifestations of suburban life: the inner city suburb and the outer suburban MPE. As discussed in Chapter One, by comparing these two groups of suburban residents I did two things. First, I defined

‘suburban’ in its broadest possible sense, and in doing so included under the one definition those inner city suburbanites stereotyped as left leaning latte sippers *and* those outer suburban residents stereotyped as a mindless mediocre mass. As a result I made way for the possibilities of similarity to emerge between the two study populations.

This study shows that when looked at through a lens of convergence, the social norms and cultural conundrums faced by suburban residents are similar in potentially very different social settings. In his study *The Levittowners: Ways of life and politics in a new suburban community* (1976), Herbert Gans set out to dispel the myth that those in the outer suburbs were a “petty and gullible mass” (1976, p.vi). While I did not begin with this intention, I consider that my work has contributed to Gans’ greater cause. I have done this by challenging the assumptions implicit in popular media that those from the inner suburbs, members of the Sharehood, are more likely to share and to be socially connected than those from the outer suburbs. Social norms can be understood as underlying principles of behaviour, but how they are enacted can sometimes look very different across different contexts.

The findings of this inquiry suggest that despite, or perhaps because of, their perception of the increasingly private and individualised nature of suburban life, participants from *both* the Sharehood and the MPEs strongly desired increased connection with those around them. Both groups strongly desired a return to the sense of strong connection and community that they had experienced as a part of their suburban childhoods, or imagined as being a possible part of suburban life. This desire for connection, as discussed in Chapter Six, was shown in a number of different ways. For example, Penny (Sharehood) thought that a neighbourhood street party sounded like ‘nirvana’, Nancy (MPE) reminisced about the strong social connections in her childhood neighbourhood, and Tony (MPE) explained that his family had moved to an MPE in search of a sense of community. Indeed it was primarily as a way of connecting with neighbours that Theo started the Sharehood. As discussed in Chapter Three, elements of popular and scholarly discourse consider that Australian suburbs are inherently self-interested, summed up in Holmgren’s comment that the suburbs have “become sterile wastelands, lacking in any true community spirit” (2005, 1). My study challenges this assumption by arguing that community spirit and the desire for connection exists, although the capacity to act on this desire may be limited.

Despite evident enthusiasm for increased connection with neighbours, participants found themselves constrained by the existing social norms of everyday suburban life. The need to appear self-sufficient, in control and independent was, in practice, stronger than the desire to connect. Participants from both groups found it difficult to create strong bonds with their neighbours. This was related to the potential for such associations to develop into relationships of obligation and unwanted reciprocity. Not only was the fear of obligation an issue, but also the concern that engagement in relationships of exchange might portray some individuals as being too reliant on others. Considering these findings more broadly in the context of urban scholarship reveals a key oversight in much of the discourse: namely that strong social connection, strong community, requires sacrifices and occasions of unwanted obligation.

I have argued that many urban scholars have been influenced by romantic notions of rural or small town life, ignoring the potential existence of complex relationships of unwanted obligation. Scholars interested in sharing have primarily focused on exotic (as in non-western) small communities and the presence of strong bonds of social obligation and reciprocity for the survival of the community (see for example Price 1975; Widlok 2004; Bird-David 2005). Both urban and sharing scholars have neglected to consider the presence of the complex factors in place that shape the existence of suburban community formation. For example, some scholars (see for example Wirth 1938; Newman 1991) have argued that the very form of the city reduces the possibility for strong primary bonds to form. Indeed, the suburbs were initially conceived as places in which the benefits of the city could be reached without compromising the strong community bonds of rural life; a marvellous compromise between town and country (Gilbert 1988). Yet it was not long after their modern conception that suburbs were seen as places empty of strong social ties (Wellman 1972). Indeed some scholars have gone so far as to deny the existence of strong suburban community (Boyd, 1952; Hamilton and Denniss, 2005). In contrast to the isolated and individualistic nature of suburbs lacking in any kind of underground social complexity of give and take, rural communities are often imagined as harmonious and generous in their communal sharing. Both of these stereotypes appear wrong to me and both do a great disservice to the lives of many people.

In preface to his book *Private Lives: Australians at home since Federation* (2008), Peter Timms writes “In essence this is the story of how ingrained habits of self-sufficiency and

family independence were gradually whittled away, to be replaced by an almost total reliance on professional providers outside the home” (2008, p.xi). I argue that not only have the ingrained habits as suggested by Timms of food production and home maintenance been outsourced, but community is also something to be potentially ‘bought in’. In contemporary Australian discussions of community, be it on billboards advertising housing estates, in government policy documents, or on the websites of sharing programs, tend to glide over a glaring reality – *community is hard work*. One of the key contributions of this study is to acknowledge that to limit our understanding of sharing to an act of giving (and not receiving), is to overlook the obligations that are created within strong community connections.

Overlooking the hard work and personal investment required for strong social connection can lead to disappointment. MPE resident Tony explained that he had chosen to live in a particular MPE because it seemed like an *easy* way to access community. In Chapter Three I gave examples of a number of different housing estates that use words to the effect of ‘instant’ and ‘easy’ community in their advertising (for example see Livingstone 2013). My study explains why the packet-mix, just-add-water nature of suburban housing estates has failed to provide a strong sense of connection for residents. Not only that, but this study also reveals a lack of capacity for building strong community connection within some of the older, more established suburbs of Melbourne. Those who seek strongly connected communities need to be willing and able to risk the possibility that they will become entangled in social webs of obligation.

The challenge for those seeking stronger connection is to transform deeply embedded, implicit social norms about citizenship, self-sufficiency and independence. To do this is to go against the modern suburb where it is considered ‘normal’ that “the individual’s investment is relatively small in the interactional network that constitutes the locality group and if his losses are too great he can cut them by getting out [socially or physically]” (Greer 1962, p.98). In the more connected communities envisaged by participants however, if someone gets into trouble or requires help, individuals have total responsibility and visible obligation to assist. It is this fear of visible obligation and entrapment into the affairs of others that is one of the biggest barriers to the participants’ utopian dreams of connected suburban life. Giving is easy. It is the ability to take, the acceptance of responsibility, of ongoing social obligation that is difficult and, when done in balance with receiving, a more significant contribution to the

development of strong social capital and the maintenance of community. In essence this study builds on the work of early urban scholars such as Simmel (1903), Zorbaugh (1929) and Wirth (1938) who claim that people in modern cities feel disconnected from one another, by explaining *why* this might be so. Disconnection, in the Australian suburban context, is at least in part due to the difficulty that Australians have with obligatory relationships.

Sharing for change: informing the development of successful sharing networks

In this study I have shown the social norms of Australian suburban life valorise the act of giving over the act of receiving. Those seeking to promote sharing can learn from the findings of this research and consider experiences of sharing in a more dialogical manner. Rather than simply assuming that sharing is inherently 'good' and can bring about social change easily if only neighbours decided to be 'generous', the findings of this work indicate the importance of a greater respect for the social complexities that may be curbing the growth of sharing behaviour. Action that acknowledges such social complexities will be vital in informing the development of successful sharing networks.

If sharing is to be the transformative practice that many hope it can be, social norms of neighbourhood interaction need to be challenged. Bourdieu's theory of habitus is primarily used as a way of understanding how social practices are maintained. However it also offers a theory of change, albeit evolutionary rather than revolutionary (Bourdieu 2000, p.161; Dovey 2010, p.33). That is, change is incremental as practices and norms are re-presented, recreated and re-enacted. Those who know the informal rules of their field well are the ones most able to make changes to as a result of their capacity to 'work' the system to their best advantage. According to Wacquant (1992), Bourdieu argues that

if we grant that symbolic systems [material and embodied expressions of cultural capital] are social products that contribute to making the world, that they do not simply mirror relations but help *constitute* them, then one can, within limits transform the world by transforming its representation (1992, p.14).

Yet within a steady state system, one uninterrupted by dramatic social or environmental change, it is only those who already play well, those who already have a refined habitus, who are able to create new symbolic systems, and to change the acceptability of certain behaviours through seamless integration of new norms.

My work contributes in two ways to an understanding of how changes to social norms of sharing might be possible; first I argue for the need for personal change and the transformation of suburban habitus that shape suburban social norms, and second I propose a number of strategies that organisations such as the Sharehood might trial in order to increase neighbourhood sharing. Both suggestions assume the need to transform social norms of sharing, recognising that sharing itself is not simply a give or take practice, but an inherently complex social contract for weaving community cohesion. Below, I outline the different ways that individuals and organisations can participate in the development of successful sharing networks.

Personal change

Personal change, through the challenging of existing social norms, will likely be a key part of the development of sharing networks in the Australian suburban context. Change that requires personal transformation is hard. In the prologue to this thesis I acknowledge my own fear of asking a neighbour for sugar. In part this is driven by my sense that my neighbours might find it difficult to refuse me and my fear that I might transgress the norm of the privacy of the suburban home. What is fascinating is how difficult I found it to ask a neighbour for a favour given my intellectual understandings of the factors at play. After all, I believe in the importance of asking neighbours for help and for favours in a variety of different forms. I value knowing the people around me and I want to live in a neighbourhood where people feel comfortable knocking on *my* door and asking for sugar, or advice about their dog, or whatever they may need. And, as revealed in the prologue to this work, I know just how powerful social norms can be. Indeed as a result of this study, I can analyse my own hesitancy to ask in the context of my own suburban field and habitus. But an intellectual understanding of the social norms at work shaping my behaviour *does not make asking a favour any easier*. In short, approaches to sharing need to be transformational –the social acceptability of asking for favours needs to be challenged.

There is a large body of literature in the field of environmental education dedicated to the investigation of the gap between knowledge and action (for a summary see

O'Donoghue & Lotz-Sisitka, 2002). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) in their review of pro-environmental perspectives and research find it is often assumed that changes to behaviour can be created through the provision of information, which individuals will consider rationally, and in response shift their behaviour. As has been demonstrated throughout this study, in the context of Australian suburban life, factors influencing behaviour are often complex and contradictory. For example, the yearning for meaningful social connection that competes with the desire for domestic privacy. Gough (2002) argues that individuals have the ability to switch between rationalities over short periods of time and as such many factors influence the apparent 'rationality' of any decision. In a sense, habitus is thus a synthesis of competing rationalities.

Despite the historical positioning of outer suburb residents being inherently different in their orientation to inner-suburban dwellers, this research has shown that the habitus of Sharehood members and MPE residents is very similar. This is particularly the case when considering the valourising of acts of giving over receiving, and how this influences conceptualisations and practices of sharing. Both participants from the Sharehood and participants from MPEs face *the same* challenges in engaging in acts of sharing – the privileging of giving and the backgrounding of receiving. This suggests that the emphasis in popular and academic media on the divisions between inner city environmentalists and outer suburban 'consumers' may be a false and unhelpful dichotomy. As such I join the chorus of voices (see for example, Gleeson 2008a; Dowling & Power 2011) calling for a more dialogical exploration of Australian suburban practices and identities. This is particularly important in considerations of social and environmental activism which tends to marginalise the potential of outer suburban residents in addressing key challenges (as discussed in Chapter Three).

The similarities of the suburban habitus of participants from both groups opens up new avenues and possibilities for inquiry into other elements of domestic suburban life. Such investigations may invite the opportunity for new narratives of suburban identity to emerge; narratives that acknowledge the complexity of the norms that we in fact share. Indeed a more detailed consideration of similarities and differences between different suburban groupings may prove more powerful in the development of cohesive social and environmental sustainability strategies than any number of targeted sharing programs.

With the creation of new suburban narratives comes the possibility for new practices and social norms. As Penny explained in Chapter Five “It’s about... your own personal development too, because a lot of this I really learnt, from ... [the] stories we tell ourselves and what little, umm, little patterns we’ve got going in our head...” (PennySH). In challenging social norms of sharing, we need to change the stories we tell ourselves about neighbourly social interaction, both before and as a part of, changing the broader suburban narratives of neighbourly sharing. In practise, this means recognising that to ask a favour of a neighbour is to offer the gift of an ongoing relationship and learn that to receive, is also to give. Thus knocking on a neighbour’s door and finding the capacity to ask is a requirement of transformative sharing. Personally, I believe it is the biggest piece of social activism we can undertake – to have the courage to make ourselves vulnerable to those around us.

Previous chapters have shown that in order to thrive in the suburban field, an embodied and tacit understanding of social norms is important. The give and take of sharing is particularly influenced by such norms. Indeed an awareness of the social protocols of giving and receiving is what shapes much neighbourhood interaction. In Chapter Six I explained the tensions surrounding the desire for social connection and subsequent social capital, but suggest that such connections are but one part of a broader social ecology of neighbourhood protocols, expectations and desires. In the context of personal change, it is to be expected that changes to how connections with neighbours are made, and the quality of social connections, are likely to occur slowly as they are integrated into the habitus of suburban residents.

Organisational change

Many sharing advocates, from community organisations, to businesses, to government agencies, are seeking ways to promote sharing at a program level. In 2012 I wrote a discussion piece in *The Conversation*, entitled ‘Sharing: if it’s so good, why don’t we do more of it?’ (Rooney 2012). As a result I was approached by the Sharehood Collective and Lisa Fox, founder of Open Shed (a business recently established under the collaborative consumption umbrella), for advice on the development of their sharing networks. Similarly, Sydney City Council has recently drafted a discussion paper *Collaborative Consumption: what it is, who is involved, and the role for local government* and asked if I could contribute to the discussion. Primarily these stakeholders are seeking insight into ways to increase sharing practices amongst their constituents. In

essence, this might be understood as the desire for knowledge that enables them to challenge a habitus in which giving is privileged over receiving.

I do not have a definitive solution for those seeking to find ways to increase sharing practices. This is not to say that this research cannot inform future sharing initiatives. The desire for definitive answers to complex questions that attempt to cope with the mess of everyday life, what Rittel and Webber (1973) refer to as ‘wicked problems’, is a part of the problem more generally. For example, groups seeking to address social and environmental sustainability offer solutions that are simple and straightforward, yet the very nature of the challenge demands a more complex and imaginative approach that encompasses not only an engineering of solutions but a recognition of the social complexities involved (V A Brown et al. 2010; A. Davison 2001).

The sanitisation and simplification of the concept and practice of sharing into a neat package of ‘generous giving’, while easier to market and sell, glosses over the very elements of sharing practice that contribute to social connection – the unavoidable tangle of social obligation and the giving and receiving of relationship. Primarily, this insight helps to shift the emphasis on sharing as purely about giving, to include the importance of receiving. There are two ways this might be done; first, through the conscious acknowledgement of the power of social norms, and second, the need to challenge current assumptions about likely barriers to sharing.

Acknowledging the power of social norms

To acknowledge the complex array of social forces, the dynamic interplay between field and habitus that shapes behaviour, is one way to begin to address the challenges people face in neighbourly sharing. This is important for making clear some of the cultural reasons for our behaviours. For example, having had many conversations with friends and acquaintances over the course of this inquiry, I have noted the power of the simple acknowledgement of the give and take nature of sharing in changing behaviour of those around me. One friend of mine said “I now sometimes go to parties and *I don’t feel bad if I don’t bring anything!*” Others have made pledges to introduce themselves to those around them and to learn to feel comfortable asking for favours. Indeed the asking of favours has become far more commonplace amongst my social networks than it once was.

The conversations I have informally about the findings of this research seem to be powerful, in that they reveal to people the previously hidden gridlines shaping social

practice. Whether or not this is as a result of strong social capital that exists between us, and their desire to show solidarity with me and my ideas remains to be seen. However, as a starting point, I suggest that for those seeking to promote sharing the most important first step is to begin the conversation and draw attention to the social assumptions likely to be shaping behaviour. It is important that those promoting sharing do not focus solely on the nostalgic images of happy neighbours and delightful cupcakes made from borrowed sugar, but that the trickier side of sharing is also acknowledged. In conjunction with the promotion of sharing networks with the assurance that participation will help “make some pocket money”, “save the environment”, or “meet the neighbours” (Open Shed 2013, n.p.), organisations might include some commentary of the challenges individuals and communities are likely to face. In doing so the act of asking for a favour becomes framed as being an act of leadership and an act of sacrifice; an acknowledgement that to ask is in itself a display of generous giving. Acknowledging the power that social norms do have in shaping our behaviour is perhaps one way to begin the process of change.

Possibilities for future inquiry

While there is plenty of discussion in a variety of scholarly discourses regarding the importance of social norms and behaviour change (for example, Shove 2003; Griskevicius 2008), there is very little about the power of acknowledging the existence of certain norms for bringing about change. That I have only anecdotal evidence of the power of acknowledgement of social norms for challenging understandings of sharing, suggests scope for further research into this area. My study indicates that further examination of social norms and social change is needed in a number of ways particularly given the emphasis above on individual social action and change. First, what are the implications for sharing practices in a neighbourhood in which an individual decides to speak openly about the social norms which shape sharing behaviour? And second, are people more likely to sign up and utilise a network like the Sharehood if the challenges of participation are made clearer? My study shows that for practices of sharing to increase, along with the associated benefits of social connection and reduced resource use, social norms of everyday suburban interactions will need to be fundamentally challenged. The question is then how can such changes be made? In essence, in the context of both personal and social action, does the foregrounding of

social norms of sharing lead to a change in the willingness of suburban residents to share, to give and/or receive, more?

Cross-cultural sharing: Tasmanian Asylum Seekers Support (TASS)

As well as contributing to understandings of sharing in the Australian suburban context, this study also has significant implications for cross-cultural sharing. One application of this work is in the context of asylum seekers to Australia. In Hobart, the Tasmania Asylum Seekers Support (TASS) network is looking to establish a sharing network between long term Hobart residents and asylum seekers new to the community. Although exact figures for Hobart are difficult to find, according to the Australian Government's *Immigration Detention Statistics Summary* (2013) there are 2,820 asylum seekers in community detention across Australia. These people are on bridging visas which allow them access to basic healthcare and a small stipend from the government but forbid them from working for money (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013). Because of this there is an increasing population desperately in need of social interaction as well as material support. In response to this need, TASS is attempting to establish a local sharing network.

TASS faces some significant barriers in developing sharing networks, not least because as has been shown in this study, the subtleties of acceptable sharing behaviour are culturally contextualised. It is probable that both asylum seekers and long term Australian residents are likely to lack habitus refined enough to ensure common understandings of how social protocols for sharing between two such groups should occur. There is little precedent, at least in the Tasmanian context for such exchanges and thus a lack of previous experience in the new social field being created. Yet in developing such networks, the findings of this work can help to provide invaluable insight into the likely challenges such a program might face. For example, the organiser of the network, on hearing about this research sent the following in an email on the 2nd March 2013:

So the big question is, how we will run such a program? How can we ensure that swaps are negotiated equitably and carried out in good faith? What is our trouble-shooting process if a swap is not upheld? Will we hold 'swap-meets' in person, online, or both? How can we set it up so that it does not become too much of a workload to manage?

It might reassure organisations such as TASS, that there was very little reference by participants from either group about bad experiences of neighbourly sharing. The notable exception to this was Sharehood member Bea, who had agreed to cook a meal for a woman in return for a lift somewhere. The lift never eventuated but Bea found herself still being asked for favours. I argue that for organisations like TASS, it is going to be far more problematic getting people to ask a favour or initiate a swap in the first place that it is going to be managing unfair exchanges.

The application of this study in the context of sharing networks for asylum seekers once again reveals the possibility for further research. For example, are people more or less willing to engage with people who are unlikely to share similar cultural understandings? Are people more or less afraid of making a social faux pas around neighbourly relations when neighbours were from an obviously different culture? And indeed in the context of sharing amongst Australian permanent residents and asylum seekers, what impact does the label 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee' have on negotiating exchanges? How do people respond to ideas of sharing when the other person participating is known to be from a completely different and potentially unimaginable cultural context?

In the context of this study, encouraging long term Australian residents to receive from asylum seekers may prove difficult. I argue this because of the deeply ingrained desire, shown by participants, to be a 'lifter rather than a leaner' may manifest itself particularly in the face of those considered to be less fortunate; what kind of good citizen, what kind of lifter, takes from those who appear to have less? The factors shaping the habitus of suburban sharing that emerged in this research suggest that for a permanent Australian resident to accept 'favours' from an asylum seeker, would be to unnecessarily take advantage of those in a weaker social position. To take from those seen as less fortunate would degrade their own social status. It seems to me that the challenges faced by TASS will involve encouraging Australian's to receive graciously from the asylum seeker population.

Towards a sharing society

That sharing is not a 'one size fits all' term is obvious in light of the findings of this study. As is to be expected when considering notions of field and habitus, the nuances of the suburban context are many and vary according to people, time and place – for example the acceptability of offering your neighbours parsley and how this changes depending

on age and gender (page 136). In Chapter Seven, I discussed how sharing is primarily articulated as being an act of generosity, while at the same time is often motivated at least in part by deeply self-interested behaviour. For example, Tony helped Joe to find a job, but at the same time, Joe helped Tony to feel good about himself and his ability to give generously. Understanding the dynamic tension between generosity and self interest and social connection and privacy is the key contribution of this work. As such, it becomes impossible to assume that sharing has any kind of single or static meaning and as such must be applied to different contexts with caution. Critical examination of sharing as a dynamic concept and practice has until now been missing from popular and scholarly discourse to the detriment of progressing towards a sharing society.

In order for sharing to be the *social* solution that many participants, advocates of sharing from the civil, public and private sectors desire, the fear and uncertainty surrounding social obligation may need to be challenged. It is this realisation at the heart of the findings of this thesis, that with strong community comes strong obligation, that has been absent from much of the Western literature on urban and suburban societies. In seeking the sharing society, there is a need for a socially transformative shift away from privileging the act of giving over receiving, to an understanding of sharing that acknowledges the mutually beneficial elements of both lifter *and* leaner.

Epilogue

I've only got one more day until I hand my full thesis draft to Kerry... I think that tonight is the night I have to go and ask my unknown neighbour for that damn cup of sugar. To be honest I'm terrified. It makes me realise just why all my participants said they'd just go to the shop. Who am I to ask a favour of a neighbour when I have money in the bank and a shop down the road? How can I justify the asking? (Research Journal, February 2013).

In seeking to encourage the creation of a 'sharing society', I believe that the discourse around what it means to share needs to be challenged. A part of this, is the creation of new stories and new social norms that can contribute to a fundamental recreation of habitus to shape and guide social interactions with neighbours in the Australian suburban field. In a moment of clarity, capturing the sentiments of nearly all the research participants in this study, Nick from the Sharehood wrote "In some ways, it is harder to receive with an open heart, than [it is] to give with an open heart" (NickSH). Learning to receive gracefully seems to be something that many people seem to find hard in the context of Australian suburban life, shaped as it is by a deep seated belief in the importance of independence and self-sufficiency. Yet it is only through learning to receive generously, and to embrace what this means in terms of social obligation and responsibility, that sharing can be used as a practice for addressing the social and environmental challenges created by, and facing, Australian suburbia. The sharing society is about learning to receive and learning to engage in challenging new relationships with the social and material resources present in everyday suburban life.

So, in an attempt to apply the learning of this inquiry to my own life, one Saturday lunchtime in March, I managed to gather the courage and ask an unknown neighbour for sugar. Taking a deep breath and grabbing a container, I knocked on the door of a house just three doors down the hill. It was opened by a woman in her fifties, who looked at me suspiciously. I said "I'm sorry to interrupt, I have a strange request, but I'm wondering if I could borrow a cup of sugar?" Her suspicion immediately turned to delight. Seemingly thrilled at the cliché, she invited me in, inquiring as to what type of sugar I wanted. As we chatted briefly, and slightly awkwardly, she asked which house I lived in and said she'd drop around some of the apples off her tree. We both grinned happily at each other.

I raced back up the street and ran in through the front door shouting 'I did it!' At that moment I felt so in love with the world, and embarrassingly I felt tears in my eyes. How could I have been so afraid of asking? I didn't explain to the neighbour why I wanted the sugar, nor make excuses about why I hadn't gone to the shops (I had toyed with the idea of lying and saying I had something on the stove and thus no time to run to the corner store). And yet she gave so freely, and looked so pleased that I had asked. And you know what? I don't think she thought any less of me for asking. Truth be told, I think she was too busy being pleased at her actions as a lifter; as she shut the door behind me she said 'No need to return the sugar, you can just have it'. I think both of us walked away feeling content.

Yet that cup of sugar, that moment of kindness, that shared experience of generosity, took me over a year to make happen, so caught up was I in a particular construction and understanding of socially appropriate behaviour in my street.

The kind of world I want to live in is one in which I and those around me, are not afraid to ask for help. The single biggest thing I can do to ensure this kind of world is to have the courage to *ask*.

I'm proud that for one day, in my neighbourhood, I was a leaner *and* a lifter.

What will you ask for?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sharehood email recruitment

Dear Sharehood Members,

I am a PhD student with the School of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania. This is a warm and hopeful invitation to all members of the Sharehood to participate in my research – Sharing for Change: Wickedness and Delight in Processes of Community Engagement.

My interest is in everyday experiences of wickedness and delight as well as in the way in which people engage and participate in local sharing activities.

Personally I am part of a slowly developing local sharing network in Tasmania and am interested both practically and academically in the interesting ways in which people get involved or participate in local sharing. I hope that this research will provide an interesting insight into effective strategies for engaging with neighbours and sharing local resources.

Involvement in this research would initially require approximately 20 – 40 minutes of your time in an interview (either over the phone or in person). For those interested further engagement in the research is possible. This research is trialling some innovative methods and as such your input into the process is most welcome and all participation will be jointly negotiated.

I really hope that some of you are willing to participate as I feel that this work will eventually benefit those interested in running community events, sharing resources and engaging with their neighbours.

For more information or to participate in this research please feel free to contact me on the details listed below.

I hope to hear from you!

Warm Regards,

Millie Rooney

Millie.

Millie Rooney

School of Geography and Environmental Studies

University of Tasmania

E: Millie.Rooney@utas.edu.au

T: 03 6226 2488

Appendix B: MPE letter box recruitment



[date]

To all [insert suburb name] residents,

My name is Millie Rooney and I am a PhD student at the University of Tasmania.

For a long time I have been really interested in the way in which Australian suburban neighbourhoods are formed, how people engage with their neighbours and the ways in which change occurs in these settings. This means that I am interested in talking residents of [suburb name].

In conducting this study on people's experiences of community and I am especially interested in your life and the story that has brought you to [SUBURB NAME].

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you and/or your family to participate in this research.

Initial participation would involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes at the time and location of your choice. Following this, there is potential for those interested to be involved further in either a focus group discussion or a letter writing exchange, and I hope that some of you agree to this.

If you would like more information on this research and/or would be willing to participate, please contact me on the details below.

Warm Regards,

Millie Rooney.

T: 0412 084 863

E: Millie.Rooney@utas.edu.au

Appendix C: MPE invitation via developer newsletter

What is a Neighbourhood? Stories of People and Places

My name is Millie Rooney and I am a PhD student at the University of Tasmania.

For a long time now I have been really interested in the way in which Australian suburban neighbourhoods are formed, how people engage with their neighbours and the ways in which change occurs in these settings. This means that I am interested in talking to you; people working and/or living in [estate name].

I am currently conducting a study on people's experiences of community and I am especially interested in the experiences of those living in Master Planned Communities.

To those living in [estate name] I would like to extend a warm invitation to you to participate in this research and share your story.

Initial participation would involve a 30 – 60 minute interview at the time and location of your choice and/or participation in a group discussion session. Following this, there is a potential for those interested to be involved further.

If you would like more information on this research and/or would be willing to participate, please contact me on the details below.

Millie Rooney

Millie.Rooney@utas.edu.au

(03) 6266 2488

0413 452 869

Appendix D: MPE poster recruitment



University of Tasmania, Australia

Research Participants Sought

My name is Millie Rooney and I am a PhD student at the University of Tasmania. I would like to extend a warm welcome to you and/or your family to participate in my research *'In the Neighbourhood: Stories of People, Patterns and Change'*.

For a long time I have been really interested in the way in which Australian suburban neighbourhoods are formed, how people engage with their neighbours and the ways in which change occurs in these settings. This means that I am interested in talking residents of [suburb name].

In conducting this study on people's experiences of community and I am especially interested in your life and the story that has brought you to Marriott Waters.

Initial participation would involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes at the time and location of your choice. Following this, there is potential for those interested to be involved further in either a focus group discussion or a letter writing exchange, and I hope that some of you agree to this.

If you would like more information on this research and/or would be willing to participate, please contact me on the details below.

Millie Rooney.

PhD Student

The University of Tasmania

T: (03) 6226 2488

0432 838 221

E: Millie.Rooney@utas.edu.au

Appendix E: Sharehood interview schedule

Interview Schedule – June 2010 – Sharehood

ALL

Tell me about yourself?

Length of time in area?

Age/kids/living arrangements?

Tell me about the Sharehood in your area?

How did it start?

How does it operate?

What vision do you/others have?

How did you become involved?

What excites you about it?

What are the challenges?

How well do you know your neighbours

Discussion of delight and wickedness

As you understand these terms, do you think delight and wickedness is useful approach to running an event?

Do you think it would be likely to work?

Would you be willing to try an approach like that?

COORDINATORS

The Sharehood vision

What is going to happen next?

How do you approach events? Would it be ok for me to come along to your next community event?

Appendix F: MPE interview schedule

Interview Schedule – December 2010 – MPEs

ALL

Tell me about yourself?

Start with how long have you lived here, where you lived before, why you moved here etc.

Start with story of how you came to be here?

The more specifics on neighbourhood sharing etc.

Length of time in area?

Age/kids/living arrangements?

What is your street like?

What kind of people live in [suburb name]?

What does living in [suburb] mean to you?

What is a neighbourhood?

Why did you move here?

Kids and school?

Local facilities/public private etc

Where did you live before?

Have there been any moments which have changed the ways in which you live your everyday life?

Why do other people move here?

How do other people relate to each other here?

Scenarios

What would you do if you wanted to borrow something (onion, screwdriver) from a neighbour?

How would they react?

Other comments?

Role of self sufficiency?

What is a symbol of success to you?

What is a symbol of failure?

What does it mean to belong here?

Are the people here like you?

Appendix G: Information and consent for written correspondence



University of Tasmania, Australia

Correspondence Consent Form

Wicked Delight: Community engagement with change

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this project.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves a series of letter writing events in which I will write about my everyday experiences of wickedness and delight as well as engagement with local community.
4. I understand that participation involves the risk(s) that my reflections may cause me to think of things I am uncomfortable with. In this is the case I understand that I am able to stop the interview at any point or decline to answer a question. I also understand that in the event of any trauma relating to this research that counselling will be provided for me by the university.
5. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for five years and will then be destroyed, unless participants consent to the data, which will not be identifiable, being archived.

I give express consent for my de-identified data to be archived (this means that the data will be stored indefinitely, but that you will not be able to be identified): (Please circle one)

Yes

No

6. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
7. I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.
9. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect, and if I so wish, may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

[On negotiation with participants, the following may be added to the consent form]

10. I agree that my letters may be shared between the other participants in the correspondence activity, although my address will not be shared. I understand that all participants have agreed to keep contents of letters confidential; however the researcher cannot guarantee this.

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date:

Statement by Investigator

☐

I have explained the project & the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Name of Investigator

Signature of
Investigator

Name of investigator _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

Appendix H: Examples of written correspondence

Handwritten and posted letter

There is clearly a strong power dimension to giving and receiving. When I went hitch-hiking last year it took me some time to learn to become comfortable receiving others kindness openly, without feeling guilt about 'putting them out'. Once, I stayed at someone's house for a night in Newcastle, then moved to a hostel the next night for fear of imposing myself. I didn't really know the person, and they had a very small house. I went to the hostel and felt very lonely and miserable there. So the next day I called up and asked if I could come back to stay again! They had been wondering if they'd done something to offend me. I went back again and cooked them dinner and we had a lovely night – I think that cooking dinner was important for me because it made me feel I was contributing something.

Typed and posted letter

I have your letter before me and I am going to start with last things first: "Trust is the number one barrier to sharing". It is true for man, woman, child and beast...I will try not to go 'behaviourist' on you-because I think it has been used to justify things it shouldn't, but I believe trust equates with survival. Too many are just 'selfish and self interested' but if we can be empathic towards others and improve relationships, we can build the possibility of sharing resources - self interest once removed, if you like. Thank goodness for the bonobo (?) apes, otherwise we would be doomed to selfishness and aggression, because we would have no other choice would we? Don't get me started on why I am not a great fan of Behaviourism...

Emailed letter – my original and participant response (*italics*)

Thinking back to the Sharehood idea, do you think sharing is a good thing? *Yes it is* And what does sharing actually mean? *Sharing means to me to share things in the community that everybody can use for instance the "Community Garden" where people might be able to contribute towards a common place where garden equipment is getting*

stored and everyone who participates in this project can share the equipment. Are there things that you would like to share but don't know how to? Some Garden equipment but not my electrical equipment. Or things that you want to borrow but don't know how to ask for? Or who to ask? Last year I had to go and buy a wheel barrow for a job that lasted 2 days because I just didn't have the will to go and ask my neighbour across the street to borrow his. I paid \$120.00 for it and now it just sits there and takes up space. I might only use it twice a year or so, therefore it was a bit of a waste to purchase it.

Appendix I: Journey to Bigland

Reflections on fieldwork experience, Dec 2010 – Journey to Bigland

Today I went on my first adventure out to suburban Melbourne. I want to tell you about it.

It began last night on the internet, throwing my hands in the air as the first public transport option to my destination gave instructions to catch the bus for 3 minutes, drive my car for 16 minutes and walk for 20 minutes. I began to wonder exactly what the developer meant by claiming that this master planned community had ‘easy public transport access’. After lots of faffing, starting again, looking at Google maps (which was only slightly more up to date than the Melways) I eventually realised that it was possible to get where I was going via public transport but that the Metlink website was rather, shall we say, ‘suboptimal’. Having now travelled there and back, I can confirm that while access by public transport is not easy, it is ‘possible’.

Although I didn’t travel from right in town, my guess is that it would probably take an hour to an hour and a half to travel from the city to this estate.

Sitting on the train I watched suburb after suburb go by. The city centre and its odd balconies, disused train sidings, triangular corner stores giving way to old houses, new houses, small houses and the occasionally really grand house. Mostly though it seemed like your typical older Melbourne suburb, lemon trees in the backyard, falling down wooden fences. As the journey continued the small European backyards gave way to larger houses with balconies looking beyond the train line to the ocean, an RSL club rising out of the flat plain. Houses soon replaced by industrial sights, power poles, an oil refinery of storybook factory proportions. Drums and barrels, flame flues and smoke stacks, twisted and knotted pipes and taps, a spiral staircase to nowhere, wires and boxes and big fences. I found myself looking out for this inexplicable creation on future journeys, making sure I secured a seat on the right side of the train.

The ocean lies to the south, its flatness blending in with the flatness of the land. A few horses grazed in a remaining paddock. Onwards the train continued until I could see the backs of warehouses, ‘Bike Warehouse’, ‘Snooze’, ‘Camping world’, ‘Sexy Land’, and ‘Baby Land’, everything supersized. Welcome to Big Land.

The train spat me out in this land of the large and I wondered where the people lived. A short and rather terrifying bus ride later and ‘bingo!’, there on the horizon, complete with Barbie style lamp posts was what I was looking for.

What I hadn’t realised was that the Boulevard was a part of the larger identity of Plumwood. There was an entrance wall welcoming me to Plumwood complete with gorgeous mosaics of orange bellied parrots, people playing, animals and plants. I cringed at the sight of so many houses unceremoniously plonked on the habitat of the enshrined, yet endangered parrot. A sign welcoming men to a men’s health walking group was tied to the fence.

The colourful outdoors feel of Plumwood was soon overwhelmed by the bright signs and car park of the Shopping Centre. I took myself through the car park and into the mall. A blast of dry air-conditioning greeted me at the sliding doors. A couple of black leather massaging chairs attempted to look like islands of calm amidst the assault of shiny floors, fluorescent lighting and sale signage. Clothing stores, food outlets, beauty salons; a mini mall.

The people in this place, or perhaps those responsible for its creation, seem to have an obsession with wellbeing and beauty (massage chairs, beauty parlours, a gym etc). The mall was an eclectic mix of beautifiers, boutiques (including an overpriced and over supplemented organic/health store), and cheaper more accessible places such as Woolworths, Lowes and Target.

Escaping from the mall I went in search of a café, wandering out into the main strip of the town centre. Manicured trees, lollipops of green, lined the street, neatly packed in with concrete. Designer grasses covered the median strip in the centre of the road and women with strollers and pastel hats waited patiently at the crossings. Avoiding the glare of the concrete heat I settled myself inside a chocolate café and prepared to watch the world ‘go buy’. Women with strollers, tradesmen, older people and even the odd couple or two; the vibrancy of the place surprised me.

Leaving the café I prepared to enter the suburbs themselves. Strolling down the outside of the mall I was astonished to hear pop music was blasting from speakers outside, interrupted only by the occasional advertisement for deals at Lowes, or the Donut King. The essence of packaged lifestyle consumption seemed to be summed up in the pre-recorded soundtrack of my experience.

Deciding that it was better to wear my daggy hat than to become sunburned, I walked into my chosen estate. It was like walking into a developers PR skit. A mother was playing in the park with her two children, blond heads clad in pastel bucket hats. The spectacular spring weather meant the gardens were lush and flowers were blooming. The sun was shining. Although scrappier and weedier in real life, the place had the same feeling of planned idyllic perfection as the advertisements.

In a similar manner, the streets were not as empty as I had expected. Although devoid of many people, the number of cars parked either on the street or in driveways gave a sense of some kind of presence. It meant there was kind of a feeling of people being around.

People were coming and going, and generally very friendly. As I watched the tradesmen go in for their morning egg and bacon roll, I wondered what this place will be like in ten years time. The trees and vegetation will be established, the houses will be weary (some are already showing some signs) and I wonder how these shopping centres will fare. In some ways I guess they will be quite successful. It really is a long way to any other centre, yet I can't help but worry how some of these things will survive with the absence of the building industry. But perhaps the shops will change, no longer takeaways for tradesmen, instead a cinema for teenagers, small businesses run by bored mums and services catering to the elderly. I wonder if they will ever become the empty shells that have been the fate of so many other small shopping centres in Australian suburbs.

That sense of energy in the place continued as I ventured past the school to another little shopping strip. An IGA, real estate, bakery, take away, Liquorland and a hairdresser. In an attempt to pick up some local gossip I enter the hairdresser and book an appointment. I'm overly conscious of my Birkenstock shoes and my inability to understand whether a blow wave just means drying my hair, or some kind of fancy styling. I leave feeling awkward and out of place, making a mental note to rethink my wardrobe.

And so I leave, looking forward to the travel time to think things through, and another chance to look at the oil refinery. I look forward to coming back and understanding this place more; untangling my sense of unease at the packet mix perfection this place seems to offer.

I end my first venture with a trip back to the mall and leave with some t-shirts designed to make me fit in with the locals. This place just makes me want to conform.

Appendix J: Initial codes

age/gender	isolation	stuff
asking	kids as connection	success
asking on behalf of	knowledge/action	support
autonomy	leadership	support
bettering self	legitimacy	taking/giving
boundaries	lending	time
burn out	money/property	tools
busy body	newness/modern	trust
catalyst	not sharing	voice
celebration/ritual	obligation	work ethic
challenge	ownership	work practices
class	perceptions of other	
collaboration	place	
collaborative consumption	power	
comfort/lifestyle	prestige/status	
commonalities	pride/shame	
community as a resource	public/private	
community facilities	recognition	
community/no community	reflection	
connection	research	
consistency	responsibility	

consumption	rules
culture	self-sufficiency
do first/ask later	sense of self
environment	sharing
established	sharing - exchange
expectations	sharing - expectations
experience	sharing - favours
facilitation	sharing - give
food	sharing - other
good citizen	sharing - swap
guilt	sharing - take
habitus	sharing - things
history	social inclusion

Appendix K: Sharehood Terms of Agreement

Sharehood: Terms of Agreement

<http://thesharehood.org/termsofagreement> - Accessed Thursday 7th March, 2013

1. These terms of agreement

Please read these terms of agreement carefully as they apply to your membership of the Sharehood community and to your use of the Sharehood website ("website"). By using the website you agree to be bound by these terms, which may be revised from time to time by updating this posting. You'll be asked to agree to any changes the next time you log in. The revised terms take effect when they're posted.

2. Communications and interactions

It's your responsibility to make clear arrangements regarding the exchange or provision of resources. Once you've agreed on the details of an exchange or provision of resources, you must fulfil your part of the agreement. If you're unable to do so or you want to change the arrangements, you must advise your Sharehood neighbour ("neighbour") as soon as possible.

To enable your neighbours to make arrangements with you and to change them (where necessary), you must provide sufficient and up-to-date contact details.

When communicating and interacting with your neighbours, you must:

- * Respect others – including their time, safety, privacy and personal space;
- * Provide accurate information about the resources you're offering or seeking;
- * Provide a safe and healthy workplace (if applicable); and
- * Not knowingly put a person in danger.

3. Loaning and Trading Goods

When loaning or trading household goods, equipment, machinery, vehicles, clothing, garden produce, compost etc. (referred to as "goods"), it's the responsibility of the receiver to confirm the suitability, quality and condition of the goods. Goods are provided on an "as is" basis without warranty of any kind. Nonetheless, the provider of

the goods must provide information on any risks associated with the goods, to the best of their knowledge.

When loaning or trading goods, the receiver bears all the risks. While the goods are in the possession or control of the receiver, the receiver is liable for any damage or injury caused by the goods, whether directly or indirectly. If the goods themselves are damaged, the receiver must pay for the repair, unless otherwise agreed.

The receiver of loaned goods must return them at the agreed time and in the same (or better) condition.

4. Provision of Skills and Services

Before a neighbour provides you with their skills or services, it's your responsibility to confirm the suitability and quality of the skills or services. You agree to bear all the risk. Skills and services are provided without warranty of any kind.

5. Your use of the Website

You mustn't post any content that:

- * you don't have the right to post;
- * is false, misleading or deceptive;
- * is racist, obscene, threatening, harassing, defamatory, discriminatory, indecent, menacing, sexually explicit or illegal;
- * infringes any privacy rights, copyright, moral rights or other intellectual property rights or misuses someone's confidential information;
- * impersonates another person or is otherwise misleading as to the origin of any content; or
- * contains viruses or similar software or data which is designed to interrupt, destroy or limit the functionality of any computer software or hardware.

Any content which breaches these requirements may be removed from the website .

You mustn't use the website to collect neighbours' email addresses and contact details, or to send unsolicited communications including chain letters, mass mailings or any form of spam.

6. Access

The website is provided and maintained by the Sharehood Inc, a non-profit incorporated association. The Sharehood Inc does not warrant that you'll have continuous access to the website and reserves the right to amend information provided, to cease providing information and to limit or deny your access to the website.

The Sharehood Inc has put in place certain security systems but doesn't warrant that the website or the information contained on it won't be subject to unauthorised access.

You can terminate your website account at any time by emailing the Sharehood Inc at support@thesharehood.org. The Sharehood Inc may terminate your account immediately, for any reason and at any time, by notifying you at your last nominated email address.

The website may contain links to other websites. If you choose to access linked websites, you do so at your own risk. The Sharehood Inc is not responsible for and won't be liable for the content or operation of those linked websites nor for any of the goods and services they may describe. The Sharehood Inc is not responsible for and will not be liable for any incorrect link to an external website.

7. Profile, username and password

You acknowledge that your profile (which includes your username and, at your option, your phone numbers) will be available for viewing by your neighbours. You are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of your username and password. You agree to be liable if your username or password is used by an unauthorised person.

If you believe your username or password has been compromised, please contact the Sharehood Inc immediately by emailing support@thesharehood.org.

8. Local currency

The Sharehood Inc operates and maintains a trading system in local currency units called Samaras. The rules and guidelines that apply to the trading system are detailed in the "Resources" section of the website. You acknowledge that your account balance may be able to be viewed on the website by your neighbours.

9. Your image

You consent to the use of your image in photos on the website or in publications or other materials for the purpose of promoting the Sharehood, unless you notify us to the contrary by emailing the Sharehood Inc at contact@thesharehood.org.

10. No Liability

The Sharehood Inc merely provides an online venue for neighbours to communicate, offer, trade, exchange, interact and make arrangements. The Sharehood Inc is not involved in any transactions or arrangements between neighbours and has no control over and, to the extent permitted by law, makes no warranties in relation to the suitability, quality, safety or legality of any content or any resources advertised, the accuracy of any listings or the ability of any neighbour to complete a transaction or act lawfully in using the website.

You release and indemnify the Sharehood Inc, its members, employees and agents, or any other person involved in creating, producing or delivering the website (“indemnified party”) from and against all actions, claims, proceedings, demands, liabilities, losses, damages, expenses and costs (including legal costs on a full indemnity basis) which any indemnified party may suffer as a direct or indirect result of:

- * your use of the website;
- * the use by another person (whether authorised or unauthorised) of your Sharehood username or password;
- * the provision or use, by you or another person, of any resources whether or not through the website;
- * your transactions or dealings with your neighbours; and
- * any event, activity or function organised between neighbours whether or not through the website.

If you have a claim or action against a neighbour arising from any of the above, you agree to pursue such claim or action independently of and without any demands from the Sharehood Inc, its members, employees and agents, and you release the Sharehood Inc, its members, employees and agents, from all claims, liability and damages arising from or in any way connected to the claim or action.

11. Disputes

Any dispute, controversy or claim between you and a neighbour which results from or is in connection with your membership of the Sharehood community or the use of the website ("dispute"), must be dealt with in accordance with this clause.

If a dispute occurs, each party agrees to negotiate with the other for at least two weeks to try and resolve the dispute amicably.

If the dispute can't be resolved, the parties must try to settle the dispute with the help of a neighbour. The parties agree to select a neighbour (if a single neighbour can't be agreed upon, each party can choose one neighbour as its representative) to negotiate the dispute for a further period of at least two weeks.

If the dispute still can't be resolved, the parties agree to try to settle the dispute by mediation. Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, the mediation will be administered by the Australian Commercial Disputes Centre (or comparable organisation) and conducted in accordance with their mediation guidelines.

No party to a dispute may commence legal proceedings concerning the dispute unless the parties have attempted to resolve the dispute in accordance with this clause.

12. Jurisdiction

These terms of agreement are governed by the law of the State of Victoria, Australia. Any dispute arising out of this agreement or the use of the website will be determined by the courts of that state and their appellate courts.

13. Surviving clauses

Clauses 9, 10 and 11 survive the expiration or termination of these terms of agreement and continue to apply to you even if you no longer use the website or your website account has been terminated.